

THE PAINFUL TRUTH

Presents

Believing the Unbelievable

Into and Out of Fanaticism

By Allen C. Dexter

I dedicate this book in loving memory to my parents,

Archie and Laura Dexter

Acknowledgments

There are several people I would like to acknowledge for the contributions they have made to my life. Many of them hold opinions and beliefs that are different from my own but most have not turned away from me and deserted our friendship.

These specific associates and friends are ones who had the most outstanding affect on my life.

Benjamin Rea (deceased), professor of Spanish language studies at Ambassador College. He gave me a working knowledge of the Spanish language.

Herman L. Hoeh, Evangelist and college professor. He was a mentor and a personal example I value.

Dr. Clint C. Zimmermann, church pastor and director of the Personal Correspondence Department. He taught me much about writing in an organized and logical manner.

Edward C. Lain, a blind businessman and writer. A loyal friend and an inspiring example of dynamic living for over 50 years. Website: <http://www.edlain.com/>.

C. Roy Hunter, a friend and confidant and well-known hypnotherapist. Website: <http://www.royhunter.com/>.

My sister, Ilene, and her husband, Max Kuhlmann. Although separated by religious faith, they have remained loyal to family ties and provided loving support over the years.

Robert E. Gentet, who worked beside me many years and has had a subsequent successful career as a minister in the Lutheran Church.

Sandra (Scott) Dexter, my ex-wife. I thank her for my four children.

It would be impossible to list all those who interacted with me over the years. I treasure the many good friends and associates I have had and offer my best wishes to all.

Foreword

I think everyone dreams of writing a book about their life and experiences.

We are all unique. We have our own experiences and gain insights we would like to pass on and have remembered. There seems to be so little time and opportunity to say what we have to say in a clear and organized manner.

Writing a book solves that problem. Others are then free to read it, or they can just push it away.

I decided to take the plunge. After many hours of writing, editing, rearranging, etc., here it is.

It's not as exhaustive as I probably could have made it, but I felt that would make for a laborious and boring piece of reading.

I'm a firm believer in the KISS principle (keep it simple, stupid).

Therefore, this is not an exhaustive autobiography. I have concentrated on the highlights I felt were necessary to get my message across.

My purpose is to pass on my experiences and the lessons I have learned in the hope that others may profit from this account. I only sought to state the facts as I have experienced them and try to refrain from judgment of other people's motives as much as possible.

Few individual names are mentioned. The important thing is the story and the lessons, not the personalities involved. Many of the people referred to are still living, and I did not want to embarrass or hurt anyone unnecessarily.

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same god who endowed us with sense, reason and intellect, has intended us to forgo their use.”

-Galileo

Chapter 1

I stood in the cool water in my bathing trunks as evangelist Herman Hoeh (pronounced “Hay”) placed his hand over my nose and mouth and firmly tilted me backward and under the water.

Three long years of anxious waiting had brought me to this day. The only way to assure my salvation, I had become convinced, was through baptism into the Radio Church of God. I had become involved with that organization through their radio programs and their written materials while I was still a teenager on my parents’ ranch on the plains of North Dakota.

As a respectful son, I waited until I was of legal age to make this journey of which my parents did not approve. I felt I now had every right to make this decision on my own.

I traveled by train all the way from North Dakota to Pasadena, California, the headquarters location of that organization. I was planning to visit for a month, with a view, maybe a dream, toward returning the following year to attend Ambassador College, the educational arm of the Radio Church of God.

By prior arrangement, my great uncle and his wife met me at the Los Angeles train station. They lived in San Gabriel, and they were kind enough to allow me to stay in an extra room at their home.

My uncle always took a special interest in me because he and his wife had never been able to have children of their own. I was the only great nephew he had on the Dexter side of his family. They made me very welcome but tensions soon developed as they learned more about my religious beliefs.

My uncle was around sixty years plus at the time of my visit, and he took a disliking to Herbert Armstrong, the group’s founder, the moment he heard him on a trial series of television broadcasts made that very November on a local station. He did not react well to the church’s dietary restrictions, which he learned of when I wouldn’t eat oysters, the anti-catholic stance he read in a magazine I had or much of anything else in its teachings and approach.

The day after my arrival, before those negatives entered into my relationship with them, they helped me find which bus would take me to Pasadena, and I left for my destination immediately.

Ambassador College, the home of the Radio Church of God, was located on South Orange Grove Boulevard. I hailed a taxi near the bus stop in downtown Pasadena and gave the driver the address I had for the college.

The taxi driver could not locate the specific address but dropped me approximately where he thought it should be. I wandered up and down a little while and finally headed down a long driveway that reason told me should be about right.

I came upon a large Victorian style mansion at the end of the driveway and met a young lady coming out the front door. I asked her if this was the location of Ambassador College. She answered in the affirmative.

I was right in front of Mayfair, the girls' dormitory. In a few minutes, she had guided me to the Mayfair basement where Herman Hoeh, who was a recent graduate and evangelist, had his office.

I was familiar with the name, Herman Hoeh, from his articles in *The Plain Truth* and *Good News* magazines. That first day, he and I had a good conference for about two hours, during which he counseled with me about my request for baptism and agreed to officiate the rite. He told me to bring bathing trunks and meet him the next morning.

Just before noon of the following day, I was dunked beneath the water of the little baptismal pool in the gardens below Mayfair and the library/classroom building. Then, Herman placed his hands on my head and prayed for me to receive the "Holy Spirit."

I always felt close to, and had great respect for, Herman Hoeh. He came from an agricultural background, as did I. He was studious and intellectual and was fascinated by history, another shared interest. He was a very kind and considerate person.

When I left the organization years later, he still greeted and treated me as a friend and brother, unlike many others in that organization. I learned of, and was saddened by, his death in 2004.

My respect and admiration for him grew tremendously after I learned of something he did years later.

He had received a doctorate from Ambassador College after the completion and publication of his *Compendium of World History*. It was his doctoral thesis.

In it, he tried to correct the errors of other historians he felt had misunderstood and distorted much of history, especially the chronology of Egyptian rulers and kingdoms. He felt as he did because there was a lot of commonly accepted history that did not agree with or support the history found in the Bible.

His work brought some vehement criticism from other scholars in the field, and he soon withdrew it from publication.

Long after I had left the organization, I was told that he walked into the college's administration building one day, laid the two volumes of his

work and his degree on the desk, commented that it was “all wrong” and left.

I really hope there is an after-life. I’d like to look Herman Hoeh in the eye, shake his hand and tell him how much I do and did respect him.

Chapter 2

That November Day, having been baptized, I felt I was finally on my way into the coming Kingdom of God, referred to as “The World Tomorrow.” That was the title Herbert Armstrong had chosen for his radio broadcasts.

That name caught people’s attention, and its emphasis on Armstrong’s interpretations of biblical prophecy resulted in a compelling message of coming doom and destruction to be followed by a returning Jesus Christ to set up that “World Tomorrow.”

Herbert Armstrong taught that Jesus’ return would usher in a thousand year kingdom ruled by Jesus, with the help of us church members, who would by then have become immortal and glorified.

According to Armstrong, we church members were to be actual brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, sharing as equals the same power and glory he had. This wasn’t merely going to heaven, as other religions promised -- this was *becoming* a part of God!

Pretty heavy stuff.

I, as an impressionable young man swallowed it hook, line and sinker, and I wasn’t the only one.

This expectation of sharing in the coming rule over the world permeated everything on the campus, in the church and in our daily lives.

Ambassador College was so named because we, in the student body, were all to be ambassadors of the coming kingdom. The college newspaper was named “The Portfolio,” after an Ambassador’s official portfolio. The college yearbook was called “The Envoy.”

Chapter 3

My life, leading up to this moment, began October 10, 1934 at my grandparents' farmhouse about 12 miles south of Dawson, North Dakota. The Great Depression was in full sway during my earliest years. My parents, supporting my sister and me, just scraped by and managed to survive.

That was in the days, now long gone, when truly small, but largely self-sufficient, farms could exist in the upper Midwest. Everybody had a vegetable garden, chickens, horses, cattle and pigs and raised a variety of field crops and hay. We also raised sheep and turkeys.

We had several milk cows, and after the morning and evening milking, we ran the milk through a centrifuge, known as a "separator," to separate the cream from the milk. As I got old enough, I was the one usually assigned to turn the crank of the separator.

The large garden provided a great deal of produce and much was canned and pickled for later use. I think my love of gardening developed there on the farm. After a rain, I would take the hand cultivator and go down the rows to loosen the topsoil to hold moisture and do away with weeds.

I still look forward to each growing season and plan what I will plant weeks in advance. I've found that not all things do well here in the desert, even with plentiful irrigation. The weather turns much too hot and dry much too early for many of my favorite crops.

We had a large potato plot. Every spring, my grandfather would bring out an old walking plow pulled by an old horse and turn over a couple of furrows. We would then carefully place potato slices containing an "eye" or two about every foot or so in the furrow and another furrow would cover them up. Soon sprouts came pushing through in the evenly spaced rows.

In the autumn, the walking plow came out again to turn over the potato rows so we could pick up the potatoes in a bucket and carry them to a wagon. They were then transferred to the basement and used all winter long. In the spring, we would again slice up dozens of potatoes and the process would start all over. The previous years crop usually lasted, in spite of sprouting, until new potatoes were available.

I remember my mother, sister and I slowly going down the potato rows and knocking potato bugs into a can of kerosene. If this wasn't done, the bugs would completely denude the bushes in a short time.

Nothing was wasted. My parents took most of the cream to town and sold it, along with eggs produced by the chicken flock. Groceries and other

essentials that could not be produced at home were then bought with the proceeds. This was referred to by my parents as “trading.” The separated milk was fed to calves or orphan lambs or used at the table.

Mom always soured some milk for use in making cottage cheese. Any excess went in a barrel to sour and was fed to the pigs.

Some cream was also saved back and allowed to sour to make butter. I spent many an hour working on our old hand powered churn, agitating that cream until the butter separated out. That was the best tasting butter in the world! The freshly churned buttermilk that was left over is a treat I fondly remember.

Not many born after my generation know what real buttermilk tastes like. All they know of as a buttermilk is the cultured milk variety I refer to as “runny yogurt.” They would probably not like real sour cream butter at all. I yearn for those tastes.

Many of our close neighbors were German-Russian immigrants who had come to America right after World War I to escape the chaos of the Russian revolution and Stalin's brutal rule. They still spoke German most of the time at home and this meant that their children had to learn most of the English they knew after starting school. This gave me an immediate advantage that always put me well ahead of them until about the fourth or fifth grade.

The children of many Mexican immigrants face similar problems in their early school years. Like those German speaking families, this will all disappear in a generation or so. Today, German is virtually unknown by the children and grandchildren of that generation.

Even the characteristic German and Scandinavian accents so stereotypical of upper Mid-westerners (the bandleader, Lawrence Welk is a prime example) are disappearing. Lawrence Welk was born and reared less than fifty miles from my original home. My father and mother used to dance to him in their courting days as his band toured the Dakotas and neighboring states.

Those German-Russians still followed many customs and practices common to the Russian Ukraine. I remember stacks of cut up manure taken from barns and sheds drying in the summer sun. Those blocks of manure provided free winter fuel much like the peat used in other areas of the world.

We used coal, plentiful and rather cheap, from the many strip mines in the western part of the state. A couple of truck loads took us through each winter. Once the winter supply was gone, I was often sent out to gather up cow chips my mother used in the old cook stove. They made a very hot fire,

similar to the buffalo chips pioneers used. Corn cobs also made for a handy fuel at times.

Another unique germanic use for manure was as a substitute for plaster. A little fresh cow manure, with maybe a little coarser horse manure for a binder, made a very cheap patching plaster to replace missing plaster. My mother availed herself of this substitute several times. Once dry, there was little or no odor, especially once it was covered by new wallpaper. My mother also made her own wallpaper paste from flour and water.

I was educated in a one-room country school where all eight elementary grades were taught together. We all got a good basic education in reading, spelling, penmanship, grammar, math, history, geography, etc. We even learned how to conduct meetings in what I remember was called “Young Citizen’s League.”

In the Young Citizen’s League we held meetings, elected officers and learned to follow parliamentary procedure, using proper terminology. We were taught the proper way was to say, “I move,” not “I make a motion,” etc. etc.

Because of that training, when I hear someone say they want to make a motion, it makes me smile. I want to ask if they are going to dance, wave at the crowd or what.

All of us in that country school were taught to read well and write legibly, and we knew the basics of grammar, spelling, history, geography and math by the time we finished the eighth grade.

We pledged allegiance to the flag and that pledge did not include the words “under God” as it does now. We learned all the words to the National Anthem, and we were taught the story behind those words.

Patriotism was a part of our education.

We were in the middle of a struggle for freedom called World War II. I still shudder to think that if it had ended in our defeat we would now be living in a very different and much less pleasant world, if we would be allowed to exist at all.

We loved our country. We were required to read “The Man Without a Country” by Edward Everett Hale and to memorize this poem:

Breathes There the Man

BREATHES there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!

Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd
From wandering on a foreign strand!
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.
-Sir Walter Scott

Those country teachers were dedicated and highly motivated. They did an excellent job with far fewer assets than are available in modern schools. We were taught not to talk back to our elders, to respect others and do our duty.

I have heard stories recently of high school graduates who cannot read. Mere children riot and curse and threaten their school's teachers, other students and administrators, often making teaching, and even attending school, a hazardous endeavor. I think those country teachers did a great job with very few advantages.

Of course they were backed up by our parents. None of us wanted our parents to know if we got into trouble at school. There was no need for harshness. Just their disapproving comments and looks were sufficient. No parent would have dreamed of coming down on a teacher because they disciplined their perfect little angel.

Chapter 4

My family was very isolated out on the ranch. Except for school, which my sister and I often missed during the winter, we had little social contact. My parents did not socialize much with others in the community causing my sister and I to be deprived of much of the social interaction some children enjoyed.

Our father was so protective of us that he would not allow us to go on school field trips or other extra curricular activities where we might get hurt. Even then, I viewed his approach as being over-protective, but I had no choice in the matter.

That isolation and lack of social intercourse was a great factor in making me very introverted and caused me to take refuge in voracious reading. My great grandmother and great aunt had been career schoolteachers. They passed on to me a great number of books.

I would spend the lonely hours engrossed in history and whatever other subjects were available. Comic books and magazines soon became mainstays, and I buried myself in any I could obtain.

As a result, my vocabulary and base of knowledge grew exponentially. I always seemed to be ahead of everyone else in my classes no matter how much school I missed.

Socially, it was a different story. I felt very inferior and ill at ease out in public. It wasn't until I entered college that my true personality began to develop and I learned how to get along socially.

When I graduated from elementary school, my chances of being able to attend and graduate from high school looked very slim. We were over twelve miles out of town and over three miles from the main highway. Our side road was often completely cut off by snowdrifts for weeks at a time. One winter, a snowplow was stuck in our side road for several days and a bulldozer had to dig it out.

There were no school buses. Each family had to solve the problem of getting their children to high school on their own.

Boarding in town would have been a great expense to my parents. Besides, my parents and I felt at that time that my help on the ranch was almost indispensable. Still, I had an inner need and yearning for knowledge that would not be denied.

The solution for me turned out to be a state sponsored correspondence school based at the Agricultural College in Fargo, North Dakota. I was supervised by the teacher of the local elementary school and mailed my assignments to Fargo. I graduated as valedictorian of a class of over thirty in

1952, traveling to Fargo for my graduation ceremony.

That same year, while visiting at my uncle's home, I encountered a magazine with the tantalizing title "The Plain Truth." The front page article proclaimed, "Hitler Did Not Die!"

This was right after World War II, and a lot of people were speculating that Hitler had escaped from Berlin and was hiding out somewhere, maybe Argentina, plotting a comeback.

I was hooked and I memorized the address of the magazine. Since it was free, I wrote for a subscription and all the back copies they had available.

In a few days, the packet arrived.

I was immediately taken in by the propaganda put forth in print and by radio by Herbert W. Armstrong, the group's founder.

Armstrong had started out as a minister for the Church of God Seventh Day. But then, he began preaching doctrines the Church of God Seventh Day did not or could not agree with.

Among those doctrines were controversial teachings like British Israelism; the necessity of observing all the annual holy days enumerated in the Old Testament (Passover and the days of unleavened bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles); the literal nature of biblical prophecy as applicable to modern events and others I will get to later.

His refusal to bow to the governance of the Church of God Seventh Day led to a split between him and that church.

He struck out on his own, beginning in the Eugene, Oregon area.

Before the Great Depression descended upon the world, he had been a successful advertising man with his own Chicago agency. That business evaporated and he joined the vast number of unemployed and desperate men looking for any way to survive.

Like many other individuals of the past and present, the field of religion set before him a lucrative opportunity he seized upon. How sincere he may have been in the beginning is impossible to tell, but I am convinced by many subsequent facts that his possible sincerity in the beginning was at most fleeting.

His experience with advertising hype stood him in good stead as he developed his religious empire. I and most others soon adopted his speaking and writing techniques. It has been said that most businesses and organizations become the lengthening shadow of some outstanding founder. Many soon disappear or become absorbed into something else after the demise of that founder, as has happened in this instance.

Chapter 5

My parents were not very happy with my new found religion, especially when I wanted to observe the seventh day Sabbath and the annual (Jewish) holy days and denounced the “pagan” observances of Christmas, Easter, etc.

These holidays and traditions added enjoyment to their otherwise somewhat drab lives and provided a connection to the people and community around them. But, I was hooked and I insisted on opting out.

The tension in our family grew, and I, as well as they, suffered deep emotional turmoil.

I had never been a rebellious child. Almost by instinct, or because I was so isolated, I usually listened to and followed my parents requests, commands and judgments. My new “fear of God” put me in quite a quandary.

I still loved and respected my parents but, I was sure, if I did not act on the “call” I felt I had received, I was going to end up as a scattering of ashes in that horrible “lake of fire” Herbert Armstrong so graphically described. I was so profoundly convinced by what I was hearing on his broadcasts and the materials I was reading that I rebelled against my parents, as I had never done before.

I determined that as soon as I was twenty-one, I would choose my own path and go my own way. I actually began to fear the possibility of early death without being able to be baptized.

Throughout my youth, my family was nominally Christian but not affiliated with any church. Dad had been brought up Methodist. I don’t recall what denomination, if any, my mother had been exposed to. I just know it was protestant of some kind.

My parents didn’t take seriously the claims of exclusive correctness of any denomination and were skeptical about the worth of attending church. My mother sometimes commented that some people just went behind church doors to hide their meanness.

Radio provided the main conduit for the usual religious teachings to gain a foothold in my young mind. I listened to such programs as Frank and Ernest, The Old Fashioned Revival Hour, etc.

My mother kept a Bible in the linen closet, and I spent many hours perusing it. I was particularly fascinated by the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch (as the first five books are sometimes called) and the historical section of Joshua, Kings and Chronicles.

Like most people, I just assumed what I was hearing about religion on the radio and reading in various places had to be at least partially based on truth. I did not question it. After all, everybody I knew and respected couldn't be wrong, could they?

I've learned a lot since then, and my naiveté has pretty well disappeared. But, not before it made me an easy mark and led me into some interesting and traumatic experiences.

I'm not bitter about those experiences for several reasons.

First, I feel I might not have developed the character and insight I now have without them. It's also doubtful I ever would have received a college education and I very well might have ended up settling for a boring (to me) career in farming and ranching.

I have no doubt I could have been moderately successful in that pursuit, but many of my natural talents and drives would have gone unfulfilled.

But that is all speculation. It's impossible to know what might have transpired in our lives if we had chosen a different course.

My philosophy is that life is a journey we start at birth. Along the way, we encounter forks in the road, and what comes next depends on which road we choose. I will be forever grateful that I was able to muster the courage and determination to leave the familiar and strike out into the unknown.

I've been forced, and often deliberately chose, to do that several times since. Each time I have gained more confidence in myself and in my abilities. With each such venture I have lost more of the fear of the unknown that holds so many back.

Chapter 6

After my first excursion from my great uncle's home in San Gabriel to Ambassador College, I spent every moment I could at the college, especially on weekends. Students invited me to eat with them at the Mayfair dining room, and church members invited me into their homes overnight.

I took to this new "family" with enthusiasm. I felt I "belonged" more than I had ever felt that way in my life before.

One Saturday night, several students and young members threw an impromptu party and I was invited. I fit right in and greatly enjoyed the whole evening. I contributed to the collection for food and drink, including a couple six packs of beer.

Dancing and food soon caused a powerful thirst to set in and I popped the top on a can of beer. Up to that time, I had not liked even the smell of beer. I was surprised at how good it tasted when one was really thirsty. I still like an occasional beer.

My visiting time in California soon ran out, and I reluctantly boarded the train back home to the familiar wintry landscape I was now determined to leave far behind me. I had tasted a new life, and I wanted more of it.

I had not been back home long when Dad, seeing my discontent, asked me if I wanted to go back to Pasadena and enter the college. I told him I did and let him know that I would be able to work my way through.

It was settled. I was elated that I could do what I wanted to do without an emotional scene with my Dad.

I knew my leaving would be a blow to my father, but I felt I had no choice. I think he had done some deep thinking while I was gone and had probably talked it over a great deal with my mother and my grandfather. It was the belief in our family that a mature man should be able to choose his occupation without interference.

By spring, I had sent in my application, and it was not long before my acceptance letter arrived. I would be part of the biggest freshman class so far. Thirty-one of us would graduate in 1960.

I had met an Ambassador student from South Dakota during my visit to California. He had gone back home for the summer and would be starting his sophomore year. We made arrangements to travel to Pasadena together.

I drove down to his parents' home in the 1947 Chevrolet I owned and spent a night in late August. The next morning, we were off and made the trip to California in two days by switching off on driving.

Chapter 7

Ambassador College was unique in providing all students with on-campus employment so they could work their way through school. Several houses had been acquired to serve as dormitories for the newly arriving students, and they were being refurbished.

I went to work immediately putting up vinyl siding on one of the houses. I worked for the grounds department that whole first year.

We were also allowed to build up a certain amount of debt each year to be paid back after graduation.

Everyone had to pass entrance examinations, and I found them not hard at all. I had always been a bookworm of sorts and had an extensive vocabulary that helped me in many areas.

It was the college dean's job to tell everyone the results of the tests. When it was my turn, he informed me that I had scored extremely high and had a higher than average IQ score. When I asked how high, he declined to tell me, stating that he didn't want me to get a "big head."

Telling me I scored so high he didn't want to reveal my score was somehow supposed to keep me humble. I still can't fathom his reasoning.

The fact that I scored above average didn't surprise me. I had always excelled in academics and usually was at the head of my classes. However, I also knew that IQ tests were very subjective and arbitrary and that they don't tell the whole story.

Such tests don't measure character and the many other traits that determine overall success in life. I have known too many under-educated people who would have scored very poorly on IQ tests but were tremendously successful in life due to their drive, talents and character.

Everybody was required to major in Theology and one other subject. I had long been fascinated by the Spanish language and chose that as my other major. Herman Hoeh advised me to take German instead because of my anglo-German ancestry.

Today, I'm thankful I followed my own desires every time I officiate a Spanish or bi-lingual wedding ceremony in the Phoenix area.

Chapter 8

Herbert Armstrong always maintained that he got his doctrines from no other organization. However, when one delves into the facts, it is apparent that, in the six months of intensive study of the Bible he pointed to, he researched and borrowed heavily from the Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

I don't criticize him for picking other people's minds, but to then intimate that he was specially led to his teachings by "divine guidance" is not quite defensible.

I fell under the mesmerizing spell individuals like him can cast, especially over the young, impressionable and inexperienced. I was like a young German of the previous generation reading Mein Kampf.

I, and other young people at Ambassador allowed ourselves to be so brainwashed that we literally would have followed Herbert Armstrong anywhere and into anything without reason, thought or question. It was not until we reached our mid-thirties that some of us really began to think for ourselves, and even then, with great difficulty.

Herbert Armstrong had moved to Pasadena in '47 and '48 and founded Ambassador College, his new headquarters. He incorporated his religious organization as the "Radio Church of God." The name was later changed to "Worldwide Church of God" when the scope and focus became truly international.

The Radio Church of God organization was still very small and family-like. Most of the growth had come from broadcasts of "The World Tomorrow" on the big Mexican clear channel stations, XELO and XEG. These were English language stations operating across the border in Mexico.

Being clear channel and operating at 50,000 watts, they covered the continental United States and much of Canada, especially during the winter months when AM radio signals reached farther. Herbert was adding any other US stations he could manage to get as fast as they became available, whether he could really pay for them or not.

This created great financial headaches for Vern Mattson, his son-in-law and the organization's business manager. It seemed that every month an urgent financial crisis was the subject of another "co-worker" letter. Most members and many ardent listeners ended up sending in much more than ten percent, and often more than they could afford, of their incomes to help in these "emergencies."

Some of the more ardently faithful deprived their families as well as themselves to answer Armstrong's call for sacrifice. Some, like myself,

were convinced that our eternal salvation was dependent upon our generous contributions to “God’s work.”

Chapter 9

The annual Feast of Tabernacles was held in Gladewater, Texas for the first time that year. Our church had acquired a piece of property there and had been able to get enough donations from members to start a “Tabernacle” on the property. It was only partially completed, but there was a lot of camping space on the grounds. Members from all over the United States gathered there in early autumn for the eight-day festival.

I teamed up with three other students, and we drove my Chevy all the way to east Texas, arriving just before the beginning of the festival. One of my companions and I found and rented a room in Gladewater at an elderly woman’s home.

I had longed to attend these festivals, so this was a dream come true. The church was still small enough to allow every member in the nation to meet in one place. There were few congregations across the country, so this was the only opportunity most members had for organized worship.

Each year, as students graduated and new ministers were ordained, congregations were being established in areas where the most members were concentrated, but the going was slow and most ministers served two or three congregations.

Often, a Sabbath service would be held in one location on Friday night and two others at widely separated locations on Saturday. It was a grueling pace that only dedicated, energetic, healthy young men could handle.

If they were married, their wives were usually at their side on these marathon trips. This put a major strain on family life and health. No money was available to build church edifices, so halls, ballrooms, etc. were sought out and rented.

The annual festivals were the only times offerings were taken up at worship services. At all other times, members and coworkers sent their tithes and offerings directly to Pasadena. The address was: Herbert W. Armstrong, PO Box 111, Pasadena, California. I doubt any old time member or associate has forgotten that address – unless they suffer from total amnesia.

I thoroughly enjoyed the festival that year and made many new friends. I felt we were like a large family having a reunion. Common cause and belief is a powerful force. We were on a mission to take Christ’s “true gospel” (according to Armstrong) to the world as endtime witnesses.

The trip back to Pasadena proved to be a great adventure. My three companions and I changed drivers and drove non-stop, except for fuel and food stops.

It was late at night. We were in eastern Arizona and I heard a loud bang from somewhere around my feet. Instinctively, I went for the clutch, but it wouldn't move.

Sometime after midnight, we pulled into Tucson and guided the Chevy into a parking spot near a closed business that had a telephone booth next to it, hit the brake and shut off the motor.

We searched the phone book for any service that might be able to immediately repair what was wrong. After much discussion, we decided that even though we couldn't clutch to change gears, we could probably start up with the transmission in first gear and shift without a clutch once we got going.

If we waited for someone to repair the problem, we would probably not get back in time for the resumption of classes. We were also low on funds. We could at least give it a try.

By the time we pulled into the campus, we had mastered the art of starting in first gear while running alongside and pushing, hopping in, speeding up and usually shifting directly into high. Once in a while the gears ground a bit.

Most of the journey was through wide-open spaces. Towns presented a problem because of traffic lights, but we learned to gauge our speed and blew through most lights before they went red.

This was before Interstate highways, so we went through a lot of desert towns. Getting to Pasadena, which was several miles north of the freeway and uphill, was our greatest challenge.

We were back with time to spare before the resumption of classes and elated at our accomplishment.

A few months later, I managed to save up the \$35 a local mechanic charged to change out the clutch. A clutch spring had broken and locked the mechanism to produce a continuous drive shaft from the motor to the differential.

When my freshman year drew to a close, I made a deal with my father for me to come back home and work with him for the summer. Two other students were headed back to Chicago, so we decided to team up and share expenses.

I saw Chicago for the first time and stayed a couple of days at the home of one of my companions. Then, I drove alone to North Dakota.

With few local churches, new converts were brought into the organization through summer baptizing tours. Teams of two, usually students and/or ministers, would travel across the country baptizing those who had requested baptism.

Herbert Armstrong's son, Richard, was a recently ordained minister who had begun doing broadcasts and was seen as the probable heir to his father's responsibilities. He headed a team that was sent into central and northern California.

Shortly after my return to North Dakota, an urgent letter arrived. A terrible traffic accident had brought Richard Armstrong to death's door. We were asked to fast and pray for his recovery, but that recovery was not to be.

Richard Armstrong died of his injuries.

Chapter 10

Herbert Armstrong had only one other son, Garner Ted Armstrong. He soon began filling the place that everyone had assumed would be filled by his elder brother, Richard. He had inherited much of his father's voice and talent.

He was as persuasive and mesmerizing as his father. Steadily, The World Tomorrow broadcast became his domain. As television became the dominant force in broadcasting, his was the face that people saw.

Garner Ted held the rank of evangelist, and many people affectionately referred to him as "Mr. Ted." He conducted some evangelistic campaigns in cities across the country, and those were fairly successful, causing rapid growth in local congregations.

He had a handsome charm that was almost irresistible. That charm was accompanied by a wandering eye and almost insatiable sexual appetite. Ambassador College was a coed institution, affording him easy contact with young, beautiful, vulnerable women.

Nearly all of us were blissfully unaware of what was going on in our midst. Garner Ted's recurring dalliances and affairs were covered up and never came to the attention of the membership at large until the early and mid-seventies.

Even then, some refused to recognize the obvious. Or, they would excuse it in some way.

In 1972, Time magazine reported that Herbert Armstrong had said, without further elaboration, that his son was "in the bonds of Satan" and had been removed from church roles. Speculation was rife that Garner Ted had been committing adultery and gambling. He was reinstated after a few weeks. The ministry and membership was beginning to sense that all was not well at the top.

The history of these disquieting and shocking events has been documented and published by so many others that I choose to refer my readers to those published and online resources. Any search engine will lead to numerous accounts and publications.

Even more shocking to many of us have been revelations of Herbert Armstrong's moral history. Again, I prefer not to go into details others have researched and documented.

One of the best publications on the subject was *Herbert Armstrong's Tangled Web* by **David Robinson**. You can purchase it online or download a zip file. Shocking information is also available at this online address:

<http://www.ondctrine.com/larmsh01.htm>.

It has been a mystery to me how so many can still look upon men of such obviously reprehensible character as somehow specially led and ordained servants of God. Maybe what Herbert Armstrong reportedly said to his daughter, when he took her dancing on Friday night (after the beginning of the Sabbath) in complete defiance of what he was preaching at the nearby “revival,” is true.

He told her: “Those ‘dummies’ will believe anything I tell them.”

This moral decadence is even more shocking when viewed in the light of Herbert Armstrong’s high moral teachings and the sexual restraints he imposed on others.

In the first few years of the college, students conducted themselves much as students at other institutions. They were young and raging hormones made the opposite sex very attractive.

This led to the usual “necking” and “petting” young humans have engaged in to some degree for millenniums. Occasionally, it went too far, and some unfortunate pregnancies and “shotgun marriages” were the result.

Herbert Armstrong established a stringent “no necking” rule among students. He maintained that necking and petting were the first stages of sexual intercourse. For unmarried people to engage in such activities constituted fornication.

Such a stringent rule was very hard for normal young people to abide by, especially once they became strongly attached to each other or engaged. Several stepped over the no necking line. If the infraction was discovered, the offending student, usually the male, was expelled in disgrace.

At other times, if the student showed great promise, the incident was treated leniently.

I am aware of one such occasion when Mr. Armstrong didn’t rebuke the young man at all but commenced to tell him what great expectations he had for him. Of course, this was a voluntary confession in private, and no one else knew about it, so he could afford to be lenient. It was confided to me years later after both that individual and I had left the organization.

As happens in all close social groups, some ministers also strayed and affairs with female members developed from time to time. Several ministers were “defrocked” and “marked.”

In recent years, I have learned that similar infractions by more prestigious ministers were hidden in much the same way as Garner Ted’s, and they maintained their high positions as if nothing had ever happened.

Meanwhile, Garner Ted was using college coeds as his private harem, and his father was sweeping it all under what had become, by then, a very “lumpy” rug.

I remember at least one occasion during this time when he said with quavering voice: “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”

It is not the human weakness that is most shocking to me. Rather, it is the hypocrisy and the double standards. Apparently, the biblical example of Eli, the Old Testament priest, and his immoral sons was not something upon which Herbert Armstrong spent very much time reflecting.

Chapter 11

As I started my college career, my talent and interest in writing and journalism led me immediately into writing for The Portfolio. I was soon helping with editing. I also began helping with the editing of The Plain Truth magazine. Just about every month, I spent many evenings helping proofread galleys and page proofs and do paste up.

Those were the days when articles were submitted to the printer and lead type was set in galleys, then page proofs, etc. We had to assemble the entire magazine by cutting and pasting and had to go over the final product to catch any flagrant errors before it could be printed. It took more than a week to turn out either publication.

Today, such a task could be accomplished in a day or two straight from an editing desk.

By my sophomore year, I was an associate editor of The Portfolio. I also got experience a couple of times at setting up movable lead type in trays in the college print shop for in-house publications. I doubt that technology exists in very many shops anymore and I am glad I had the opportunity to become acquainted with it. It helps me appreciate the ease with which I can write and edit this manuscript.

Being able to work and go to school afforded all of us an opportunity for a college education many probably would not have gotten otherwise.

There was plenty to do at Ambassador College.

The institution was growing rapidly. The college was constantly purchasing residential properties bordering the campus. In contrast, the faithful members were usually living in rented quarters awaiting the end.

Some of them still are.

The “housing gospel,” according to Herbert Armstrong, was that church members were advised not to buy homes or other properties and material things, since the end was so near. Instead, they should give that money to the church so it could get Christ’s warning message to the world before the end.

Many of them missed their chance to buy homes at a reasonable price in California. If they had, they would have long since had their homes paid for. Instead, they have become elderly while California property values skyrocketed beyond their means.

All of the church and college properties paid for by the tithes and offerings those sincere people sacrificed to send in now belong to someone else. Another religious organization has taken over and got the properties at a very good price.

You guess who has profited from the “fire sale.”

Certainly not the little old lady on Social Security who did without light bulbs so she could send in her “widow’s mite.” Nor was it the parents who let their children go without dental braces so “God’s work” could have the money.

Meantime, the radio audience was increasing exponentially, bringing thousands of letters a day, most containing contributions. Those letters had to be read, literature requests filled, contributions recorded, etc.

We were all very busy.

Chapter 12

Most of my second year, I was on the Janitorial crew and rose to foreman. This was mainly night work, and it was difficult to find time for study, writing papers, etc.

The first disquieting thing (to me) occurred as I returned to the campus for my sophomore year. I don't know whose idea it was, but the whole male student body was suddenly required to bound out of bed at six am five days a week and assemble on the athletic track for military style drill and vigorous exercise.

I was room monitor in one of the rooms in Del Mar Manor men's dorm. It was my duty to get everyone in my room up and out on the track. One good friend of mine with whom I still correspond remembers those days well and has never ceased to remind me how jarring my "mellifluous" bass-baritone was at that hour of the morning.

Most of my janitorial duties were at night, and class schedules provided no nap times. I and my fellow janitorial workers, and many others, found ourselves trying to get through day after sleep-deprived day without falling asleep in class.

One fellow student and a fellow janitor manifested his innate rebellious streak by slipping down to the basement, entering one of the prayer rooms provided there, locking the door, using the cushion for a pillow and going back to sleep. Although mentally brilliant, he was not successful as a student and never graduated. Nor was he ever able to get a successful career going until late middle age when he started some kind of religious organization of his own.

I've noticed that the field of religion often serves as a haven for social misfits such as this brainy friend of mine. Like Armstrong, if they can find some catchy doctrines or approaches that grab the attention of enough people, their financial future is made. The world is just too filled with lonely, searching people looking for someone to show them "the way."

This was the only time in my college career when I seriously contemplated packing up and leaving.

I actually buttonholed Garner Ted outside the broadcast studio and told him the program was too much. All I got was a raised eyebrow and a look that telegraphed to me that he thought I was a wimp.

I didn't see him out there on those mornings. He was probably snug in bed with his wife -- or someone.

Fortunately, the program stopped several months down the road. I don't remember exactly when. It was something I tried to expunge from my memory, and I guess I was successful.

I don't recall ever learning exactly why the program was dropped, but I always suspected that the Pasadena citizens living in houses adjacent to the college track didn't appreciate being rudely awakened at that hour of the morning by "jack hammer-like" commands booming forth just outside their bedrooms.

Early in my junior year, I was drafted into the mailroom to read and channel letters and code-mark them for literature mailings.

From that job, I was transferred to the letter-answering department where I learned to communicate acceptable answers to people's questions, problems, etc. It was considered a semi-ministerial appointment. I remained there the rest of my college career.

Shortly before graduation, in early 1960, I became engaged to a freshman girl, Sandra Scott. We planned our wedding for July 17 and were married on that date in the lower gardens where I had been baptized, with recently ordained Albert J. Portune officiating.

After a week's honeymoon in central and northern California, we settled down to married life, thinking we would be stationed locally for the foreseeable future.

Pastors of local churches were desperate for help. The New York City pastor's helper was returning to Pasadena to complete his senior year, and he needed someone to replace him. I was called on in late August and told that I had to get to New York as soon as possible. In less than a week, we were on our way.

I asked to swing by North Dakota to visit my parents, but that request was denied. I had already started to notice that almost no consideration was too much for those at the top of the organization and close to the Armstrongs, but others were treated with far less consideration.

This was especially true if it included people on the "outside," like my parents were at that time.

I dutifully accepted the decision, but it was a "memory" that built up with many others to cause me to question the real attitudes and motivations of those in control.

Chapter 13

Before I continue with the history of my association with Ambassador College and the Radio/Worldwide Church of God, I would like to summarize and comment upon the teachings, doctrines and practices that I wholeheartedly accepted and lived up to for so many years.

Herbert Armstrong taught that God was a family. At this time, there were only two members in that family, the Father and his son, Jesus. Being “born again” really meant, according to Armstrong, becoming converted, being begotten of the Holy Spirit, remaining true and faithful and being born again into the divine family at the resurrection of the dead or by an instantaneous change at Jesus’ return.

Herbert Armstrong taught that the soul was not immortal, and the incorrigible would not suffer eternally but be totally destroyed in a lake of fire at the final judgment.

Rather than the lost, who had never even heard of Jesus, being condemned to an ever-burning hell, those who had not overtly rejected a chance for salvation would have their chance to accept Jesus and be saved in the second resurrection mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

To me, this was a far more just and believable doctrine than that espoused by some Christian denominations that teach that innocent children are condemned to hell by “original sin” if their parents neglect to have them baptized.

The ridiculousness of “hell,” as most people say they believe in it, is amply demonstrated by this item that has circulated by email for several years. This urban legends website vouches for its authenticity:

<http://www.snopes.com/college/exam/hell.asp>

The following is supposedly an actual question given on a University of Washington chemistry mid-term. The answer by one student was so profound that the professor shared it with colleagues via the Internet, which is, of course, why we now have the pleasure of enjoying it as well.

Bonus Question: Is Hell exothermic (gives off heat) or endothermic (absorbs heat)?

Most of the students wrote proofs of their beliefs using Boyle's Law.

One student, however, wrote the following:

“First, we need to know how the mass of Hell is changing in time. So we need to know the rate at which souls are moving into Hell and the rate at which they are leaving. I think that we can safely assume that once a soul gets to Hell, it will not leave. Therefore, no souls are leaving. As for how many souls are entering Hell, let's look at the different Religions that exist in the world today. Most of these religions state that if you are not a member of their religion, you will go to Hell.

Since there is more than one of these religions and since people do not belong to more than one religion, we can project that all souls go to Hell.

With birth and death rates as they are, we can expect the number of souls in Hell to increase exponentially. Now, we look at the rate of change of the volume in Hell because Boyle's Law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in Hell to stay the same, the volume of Hell has to expand proportionately as souls are added.

This gives two possibilities:

1. If Hell is expanding at a slower rate than the rate at which souls enter Hell, then the temperature and pressure in Hell will increase until all Hell breaks loose.
2. If Hell is expanding at a rate faster than the increase of souls in Hell, then the temperature and pressure will drop until Hell freezes over.

So which is it?

If we accept the postulate given to me by Teresa during my Freshman year that, ‘it will be a cold day in Hell before I sleep with you,’ and take into account the fact that I slept with her last night, then number 2 must be true, and thus I am sure that Hell is exothermic and has already frozen over. The corollary of this theory is that since Hell has frozen over, it follows that it is not accepting any more souls and is, therefore, extinct...leaving only

Heaven -- thereby proving the existence of a divine being, which explains why, last night, Teresa kept shouting ‘Oh my God.’”

This student received the only A in the class.

Armstrong denounced the concept of the Trinity because, he said, it limited the divine family to three and Jesus couldn't have had two fathers – God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit was the divine spirit essence of which both present members, and all future members, of the Godhead were composed. It alone conferred immortality upon mortals.

There was quite a difference in the way in which we were supposed to become sons and daughters of God and the way in which Jesus was said to have so become (by actual divine impregnation of a human egg cell and a “virgin birth.”) Our church taught that, by some magical divine process, the pre-existing member of the godhead we know as Jesus “emptied himself” and became a sperm, or something, that impregnated Mary.

How that would make the “Father” his father is kind of mystifying. Did the “Father” somehow absorb him and then inseminate him into Mary's womb?

But, all gods people have invented are capable of astounding things, aren't they? When I was really young and prone to childish fantasy, I thought Superman made sense.

I believed at that time and didn't permit doubts to enter my mind.

I am less impressed by that story the older, wiser and more educated I become. When I go to websites like the one I'm citing below and read the historical facts, my wonder turns to the outright certainty that it is purely ignorant myth.

The mythology surrounding many of the major gods of antiquity makes them saviors born of virgins – and at the rebirth of the sun on December 25, after about three days of no discernible movement.

The unscientific and unreasonable belief that virgins could give birth permeated the mythologies of the ancient world and is based on astrology. There is absolutely nothing new in the New Testament myth. See: <http://jdstone.org/cr/files/mithraschristianity.html>.

Many who believe the virgin birth story would condemn with horror the very idea of modern day test tube babies, cloning and surrogate parentage as somehow immoral and against God's wishes.

Yet, the very story they so ardently defend shows that Mary, the betrothed wife of Joseph, would have been, if one believes the tale, a

surrogate mother --without Joseph's prior permission. You can exercise your imagination as easily as I as to how the "insemination" somehow took place.

Since she was betrothed to Joseph, she was already bound to him by the Jewish customs I understand existed at that time. It does seem rather autocratic, presumptuous and inconsiderate, even on the part of a deity, to inform Joseph as an afterthought.

Of course, the whole virgin birth myth is a ridiculous relic of the common Middle Eastern superstitions that permeated all of those ancient cultures and got written into the New Testament by Paul and his Greek followers decades after Jesus' crucifixion.

Those disciples and subsequent theologians faced quite a task reconciling pagan god man myths with their Jesus. The resulting theological doctrines contain a great deal of ludicrous nonsense when viewed logically.

Herbert Armstrong's teaching of British Israelism was a condensed rendering and slight alteration of "Judah's Scepter and Joseph's Birthright" by J. H. Allen, originally published in 1902.

The United States and Great Britain were supposedly descended from Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The democratically inclined nations of northwestern Europe constituted descendants of the other "lost" tribes that seemed to disappear from history after the Assyrian Captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The doctrine, in one form or another, goes back centuries. An abundance of information on this controversial teaching and Allen's book is available via the Internet.

Armstrong condemned modern medicine as idolatrous desertion of God as healer. Vaccinations, such as those that wiped out smallpox, polio and other scourges of mankind, were denounced as injections of "monkey pus," and even aspirin was looked upon as a "low grade poison."

When an individual became sick, he or she was to call upon the ministry for anointing and prayer or they would send for an anointed cloth. In the event the sick or injured person was a child, the parents had the responsibility of calling for anointing and prayer.

Any surgical procedure other than "repair surgery" was frowned upon.

A lot of members and their innocent children suffered and died unnecessarily due to this extreme teaching. The only funeral I ever officiated in my career with this church was for a five-year old girl in New York City who, I believe, died for that very reason.

I was too dedicated to realize or admit the truth at that time.

Childbirth at home without the intervention of anesthetics and drugs was considered the proper approach to birth. Only in the event of birth complications were the faithful to consider going to a medical facility.

This approach to birth and medicine modified somewhat over the years, and by the early 70's, there was an Infirmary operating on the campus staffed by qualified medical personnel who were also church members. They had to tread a fine line between their medical oath and Herbert Armstrong's radical teachings.

By the time my fourth child was on the way, in 1971, nearly everyone went to the Infirmary for birth. This rankled me.

I was getting more and more confused and bothered by former assertions and present practices. I told the head doctor that what was true five years ago had to be true today, if it indeed was ever true. I wanted my child delivered at home, as all three others had been, with me at my wife's side.

I prevailed, and a qualified nurse attended the uncomplicated birth.

Diet and lifestyle was taught to be the main sources of disease, especially "unclean" meats. We went to great lengths to avoid all pork, shellfish and anything else not enumerated in the old testament as being "clean." A great worry was how to determine if the shortening used in commercial products might contain lard.

Chapter 14

“The Work,” as the church’s mission was referred to, was also identified among members as being “in the truth.” All other religious organizations were regarded as satanic counterfeits and harlot daughters of the “Great Whore” of Revelation -- the Catholic Church and its protestant offshoots.

It is a mystery to me today, how the Bible canon, so ardently defended as God’s inerrant word, can be accepted “carte blanche” by people such as Herbert Armstrong who denounced the Catholic Church so vehemently.

That canon was composed, edited and voted in by Catholic Councils! Those councils were decreed by Roman emperors identified by Armstrong as the prophetic “beast.”

When I was young and still mesmerized, that thought somehow never occurred to me.

How can those vilified as instruments of Satan somehow sort out, edit and decree an “inspired” canon of the Bible?

Herbert constantly stressed that God would not save anyone he could not rule. To qualify, you had to be totally converted and subject to any command of God you understood, including the proper days for worship, tithing, what to eat (only biblically approved meats) and who to look to for spiritual guidance (Armstrong himself and his approved and ordained assistants).

Before any candidate could be baptized, they had to satisfy whoever was conducting the rite that they were in total subjection to this rigorous and legalistic top-down rule.

God The Father was at the top, Jesus next and the ministry of Armstrong’s church followed, with an authority that was almost as wide sweeping and dictatorial as that of the Catholic Church.

That approach effectively put Herbert Armstrong in the position of being God. A relative of one of my fellow students pointed out that fact to him shortly before he left for college. Both he and I were too taken in to realize the truth in that assessment at that time.

That approach is not really unique to Armstrong's organization. It is rather common in a great number of religious organizations, especially so the more cultic they are.

Herbert's personality was very narcissistic and similar to the personalities of men like Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein. He could come across as very charming and benevolent, but in reality, he was mercilessly

cruel and ruthless. I don't remember who said it, but someone commented that the pathway of his life was strewn with the wreckage of the lives of men who had served him well.

I can vouch for the fact that the assessment is true.

The nearness of the end of the world was constantly emphasized. The books of Daniel and Revelation provided ample ammunition for dire predictions of end time disasters about to befall the nation and the world.

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Armstrong looked to prophecy time lines that seemed to be upheld in the book of Daniel and thought the "end" would occur somewhere around 1975. We even published a booklet called "1975 in Prophecy."

Such predictions and prophecies, like their counterparts of the past, were especially harmful because they convinced people there was no point in planning for a future that wasn't going to materialize. Instead, they heeded the admonition to put their "treasure" into God's work (the church) and lay up rewards in the soon-coming kingdom.

That "kingdom" did not materialize in 1975 and is nowhere on the horizon now. Many of the believers in our church passed up the opportunity to own homes and make investments that would have secured their futures.

Because of that teaching, many have ended up in what can only be described as penury. A great many have died totally penniless, depending on their families or the government for everything and leaving nothing but debts to their children.

Previously, Herbert Armstrong had confidently predicted that the end was near in the mid-thirties. He became especially dogmatic during World War II. Others have documented fully his litany of predictions and their failure. The facts and documentations are available online.

The book of Daniel, which was used to "prove" such prophecies, I have since determined, was a spurious fiction written hundreds of years after the Babylonian captivity. It bears no relationship to historical fact.

Historical facts prove that Nabonidos, not Belshazzar, was the last king of Babylon. It was Cyrus, not Darius the Median, who took Babylon – peacefully, not through bloodshed.

The fiery furnace is comparable to a tale of science fiction. It never happened, except in the fertile imagination of some Jewish zealot around the time of the Maccabees!

A summary of these and other pertinent facts that prove the book of Daniel is a forgery are to be found in *The Forgery of the Old Testament* by Joseph McCabe. It is available from amazon.com. J

Now, I see a lot of sensational propaganda about the end of time in 2012. This is based on supposed Mayan prophecies, a galactic alignment and vague writings by Nostradamus and others. Even the descendants of the Mayans are baffled by such claims.

I'm about as worried as I was when calamity was predicted for the turn of the millennium. Unless some madman starts a nuclear holocaust or an asteroid or comet hits the planet, I'm convinced things will go on pretty much the same for an indefinite period of time.

Of course, there will be disasters. Disasters happen all the time on planet earth. They've happened in my own life or certainly affected my life.

References to "Petra" in several places in the Bible led Herbert Armstrong and several of the new ministers to believe that an ancient desert city by that name in the nation of Jordan was to be the end time refuge and place of safety for God's faithful referred to in Revelation 12. Herbert had even made a journey to Petra.

How this flight would or could be made no one knew, but all of us had absolute faith God would supply the way and the means – through Herbert Armstrong's leadership, of course.

In 1971, when my wife and I were expecting our fourth child, some of my close friends thought we were being very reckless. If things were to end in 1975, as prophesied, and the church was to flee about three and a half years prior to that, our flight was imminent and would be much more difficult with a tiny infant to care for.

By that time, I could see that something was very wrong in the prophetic scenario we had been following. I wasn't very worried by their dire predictions.

That child is now a mature adult, and none of the momentous things Herbert Armstrong prophesied then, previously or since have occurred.

It's an old story. End time prophecies have been made for centuries. The prophets all ended up with egg on their faces.

Many lives have been disrupted and ruined by those prophetic interpretations and pronouncements. In all such cases, the true believers found some way to explain it all away and ignore the obvious.

Armstrong's approach to evolution really appealed to people in the "Bible Belt." He had accepted the "gap theory" whereby the "creation" of Genesis was not the only creation. It was a special creation to regenerate an earth destroyed by Satan's rebellion and bring mankind on the scene.

Armstrong maintained that Satan, as Lucifer, the light bringer, had been custodian of an earth that had existed for millions of years and over

which creatures like the dinosaurs held sway. When Lucifer rebelled against God, the resulting “war in heaven” destroyed everything on earth. What we saw around us was a new creation that had taken place in seven literal days.

Why God would mess around for millions upon untold millions of years with giant dinosaurs, amphibians, etc. and then be powerless to stop one of his own creations, the mythical Lucifer, from destroying it all is a question for which I now can’t imagine a plausible answer.

Did it take him all that time to finally get his act together and decide that creating man was necessary for his divine fulfillment? And, which of the two or three (take your pick) in the godhead was it that had the “eureka moment?”

At the time, this doctrine made sense to enthusiastic people like me. We could see the evidence in the rocks, but we wanted to believe in the Bible. The idea that everything found in the strata of the earth had gotten there in a few thousand years was ridiculous to the extreme, and we could see that fact.

This “gap” and special creation was the answer, as far as we were concerned.

I’m certain, if we had known at that time about the Chicxulub asteroid or comet impact that at least helped wipe out the dinosaurs, it would have been attributed to the “war in heaven.” The explanation of the 65 million intervening years, filled with all kinds of far different and also extinct fossils, including pre-human hominids, would no doubt have made an interesting story.

I wonder what those who still hold to his teachings are doing with fossils of feathered dinosaurs. I’m certain they’ve come up with something to explain away the obvious and hold onto their revised Babylonian creation myth.

I know now that all this nonsense about Lucifer, Satan, etc. came directly out of astrology and sun worship. For some eye-opening facts, check out this web address: <http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Planet-Venus-is-the-Light-Bringer-and-the-Story-Behind-the-Fall-of-Satan-in-Isaiah-14&id=238438>.

While we are on the subject of asteroids and comets hitting the earth, it is clear from the records in the rocks that these events happen periodically on earth. Earth is a moving target in an interstellar shooting gallery and every once in awhile, a ricochet comes charging in from somewhere way out there.

Every few million years, just about everything living on our planet gets wiped out. Life then evolves in a different direction.

Knowing this, we humans had better get cracking on developing the space technology that will enable us to avoid joining Tyrannosaurus Rex in the extinction lottery.

“Oh, God would never let that happen,” those of great faith might say. Hmmm.

Seems to me I remember that Jesus, according to the account all those catholic councils allowed us to have, said he was going to come back in the time of the generation then living.

Where is he?

If he couldn't get back here on the schedule he himself set up, assuming that he really did set up that schedule, am I supposed to trust that either he or the Father is going to put on some cosmic baseball mitt and snag some comet or asteroid with a routing tag marked “EARTH?”

Pray all you like.

Be my guest, you of great faith.

As for me, I'd like a much more reliable “pool cue” to use in this cosmic billiard game. I can even hear the call: “Ricochet off Saturn, kiss Titan, bank off Jupiter, comet into Mars – it needs the extra water and atmosphere.”

The worldwide “flood” was also an absolute truth in our eyes.

The engineering principles that prove no ship made of wood and anywhere near as large as the ark would have had to be could have been held together by any means never entered into our consciousness. There are solid engineering principles that put a very definite limit on the size of wooden sailing vessels.

Where were the supply ships that would have been necessary to support all those animals and their caretakers. It would have taken far more support vessels than required for modern naval task forces. We aren't talking about a few sacks of oats here.

How eight puny humans could have fed and cleaned up after that many animals for even one day boggles the mind. It takes scores of people to administer even a moderate size zoo.

That fictional boat would have been the dirtiest, smelliest, most disgusting thing to ever float on water!

And, who was the trusting soul that volunteered to feed and take care of the cobra or black mamba? The alligators and crocodiles?

The fact that creatures exist in isolated places thousands of miles and oceans away from the Middle East and nowhere else and that their fossils, multiple thousands of years old, are found in those same places didn't enter into our thinking.

The flood is a myth that blew out of proportion the breaking up of the Bosphorus as the ice age ended and the flooding of the immense plains to the north. No doubt, many unfortunate people died, but the vast majority escaped and the whole world was not destroyed.

There may have been a prescient individual named Noah who built a boat and put his family and some farm animals on it for a few days so they could ride out what he saw coming. Lots of others probably did the same thing, but their stories got lost in the shuffle. Wild animals and most people simply fled before the rising waters.

Just like the daughters of Lot, Middle Eastern folk tend to assume a great catastrophe is worldwide in scope, especially when it gets retold, expanded and translated countless times over multiple centuries.

Some of the stories of our own nation's past, a scant two centuries ago, have been proven to be a bit fictitious, and we had the advantage of a written history as opposed to oral legends.

For more on this subject, go to this web address:
<http://www.blackchampagne.com/articles/noahs-ark.shtml>.

Chapter 15

Another doctrinal extreme was the church's approach to divorce and remarriage.

Marriage was for life. End of discussion.

The only grounds accepted for divorce was undisclosed premarital infidelity or some other circumstance that rendered the original marriage contract fraudulent. This was not really a divorce, but an annulment.

Any such annulment existed only in the eyes of this church. One could not legally end a marriage or remarry under state laws without benefit of a court sanctioned annulment or divorce.

Those who had been divorced and remarried and wanted to get out of a second marriage so they could be baptized and become church members still had to resort to formal divorce through the courts. The only thing they had to look forward to after such a divorce was either reconciliation with their first mate (usually impossible) or a lifetime alone for as long as that first mate lived.

Their former spouse could go blissfully along in a second marriage, but they would sleep forever in a cold, lonely bed because someone had once decided to put an end to an untenable relationship, which Armstrong ruled contrary to the will of a "loving God."

Hundreds of prospective members were refused baptism until they dissolved what were regarded as adulterous second marriages. In a few instances, especially with elderly individuals, they were allowed to live together as "brother and sister" totally abstaining from sex.

The issue was thorny, to say the least.

Many of us now look back with sadness at the havoc we helped introduce into people's lives.

In later years, my parents, who joined the church several years after me, told me of the extreme approach one of their local ministers put forth during a Sabbath sermon. He maintained that all marriages not performed in God's true church (The Worldwide Church of God) were invalid and that such individuals were not really married at all. This left many church members, including my mother, in considerable consternation.

On the way home, my Dad replied to my mother's concerned comments, "We're married!" He wasn't about to countenance such nonsense.

It was one of several times I heard them make remarks that led me to believe they weren't brainwashed senseless like many others by everything the ministry put forth.

They went along, and they loved the people they knew in the church, but old North Dakota farmers don't get weird very easily.

The whole premise put forth in that sermon was ludicrous. When carried to its ultimate meaning, even Herbert Armstrong's marriage would have been invalid, since it took place long before he had any connection to "God's true church."

Such extreme approaches reared their head from time to time, and they weren't always Herbert Armstrong's ideas.

While I was in college, one of the students went on quite a campaign to try to find some way to condemn the observance of Mother's Day as a holdover of pagan worship of Venus and what was regarded as idolatrous Catholic reverence for Mary.

His attempts to find a new "truth" and advance his standing were fruitless, but if he had been one of the prestigious leaders, I wonder what might have happened.

In the late sixties, a minister who had had extensive musical training put forth the premise that musical instruments played with a bow, like the violin, were somehow not proper. He believed that premise partly because he couldn't find any example in the Bible of musical instruments of that kind. To his chauvinistic thinking, anything proper had to originate with God's "chosen people."

To his credit in this case, Herbert Armstrong rejected the minister's pronouncements as nonsense.

The Jehovah's Witness doctrine against the observance of birthdays did make its way in. That was the first doctrine I really had trouble with. I couldn't grasp the reasoning behind it.

I thought it was uniquely the teaching of our church until I came across a copy of the Watchtower in a letter a listener sent in and saw that the Jehovah's Witness article on the subject was almost a carbon copy of what we were distributing. This obvious plagiarism done by Worldwide was very troubling to me, equally because of the plagiarism and the utter nonsense of the doctrine.

There was a verse in the Bible which stated, in the King James English translation, that only God's name was "Reverend." This was taken to mean that it was sacrilegious for a minister to be addressed by that title of respect.

Thus, all ministers, including Herbert Armstrong, were addressed by the title "Mister" or by their rank (elder, pastor, evangelist).

Having always been a student of words and their meaning it became puzzling to me over time how "mister," a variant of "master," could be used

in light of Jesus' prohibition in Matthew 23 against calling anyone on earth your master. It began to appear to me that we were straining out "gnats" and swallowing "camels."

It was an empty semantic argument.

The title "mister" was viewed as just as necessary a title of respect as "reverend" was in any other organization. Members would be "chewed out" just as vehemently for treating ministers with too much familiarity as in any other church, or even more so.

The spirit and meaning behind the two titles were basically identical.

Chapter 16

The church's approach to child rearing also proved to be very destructive over time. The admonition about sparing the rod and spoiling the child became a mantra for considerable extremism and child abuse.

I remember a college assembly in which some of the advanced students who already had children demonstrated how obedient babies could be made with the "proper" discipline. One student demonstrated how quickly his baby would rise up or lie down on command.

I found out years later that Mrs. Herbert Armstrong was appalled by the demonstration and commented that children should never be treated that way.

Nobody told us impressionable students that the demonstration and lecture was anything but "God's truth." A man was to rule over his home. Parents were to rule over their children. Thus saith the Lord.

I learned subsequently that the impression given in that assembly was totally erroneous as far as at least one of the participants was concerned. Here is his statement regarding it:

"The first thing I want to state as emphatically as I can is that I NEVER ABUSED MY CHILDREN - - EVER AT ANY TIME! I obtained "compliance" by holding each child on my shoulder and gently but firmly whispering in their ear "No!" when they were attempting to let their temper run wild. I never had to administer discipline as they responded to my calmness and my firm whispering voice in their ear as I held them close.

"I might mention that my wife and I dated for two years before we were married. during that two year we STUDIED DILIGENTLY all parents and children we came into contact with. By the time we were married and had children we had a pretty good road map to follow and we found that the two years of diligent preparation paid off. Neither you NOR ANY ONE ELSE ever saw us abuse any of our eight children.

"I will gladly comment on the comment you made about the demonstration. Actually, Allen, I have regretted that all through the years. What I am about to say is NOT to be considered a "cop out!" But Rod Meredith (the speech instructor) had me give that speech in the assembly. I did not want to as I never wanted to put my children on display. But, as a student I felt I had to 'follow orders.'"

That was the norm in the church and college. If a "gruppen fuhrer" like Meredith wanted you to do something, you had better comply. If you didn't, you would be branded as having a bad and rebellious attitude.

More mature, less fanatical and experienced church members often avoided the extremes that so many of us less mature and inexperienced came to recognize and regret – after the inevitable damage was done.

My own children suffered greatly from our attempts to make them mindlessly obedient. I instinctively questioned this approach early on. I hadn't been brought up that way and it appeared to me that how I turned out was acceptable.

It was a different story with my wife. She was the quintessential “true believer.” I was trying to back off the discipline and she was constantly going to the ministry behind my back and complaining about my inability to get my children under control.

My older son resented his mother's harsh treatment so much that he has practically nothing to do with her to this day. He has told me of the many belts she used for discipline that he threw over the fence into a neighbor's ivy every chance he got. She would just go to the thrift store and buy another one.

I ended up between the proverbial “rock and hard place.”

Her complaining to the ministry led them to believe I was a weak wimp who couldn't control his household. I was in constant fear of being fired over that unfair, one-sided assessment. I used to come in the back stairs to my office so I wouldn't have to pass the director's office and give him a chance to chew me out, or fire me. I felt like a criminal waiting for the “heat” to subside.

It got so bad that the minister she was going to, and who was second in command in our department, became convinced that I was “unconverted.”

Branding people “unconverted” became a catchall fad for a while, and he momentarily bulldozed over me and had me convinced. This was just before a Passover, so I missed the Passover that year because it was considered taboo for the unconverted to partake.

I had second thoughts almost immediately and went to see Herman Hoeh, who had originally counseled me for baptism. He saw no credulity in such a claim and probably saved me from being fired because of my “unconverted status.”

I guess the fact that I was “easy” in fulfilling my wife's requests, if there were any way for me to do so, counted against me in her eyes and caused her to have less respect for me.

She expected me, or so she claimed, to be like the “macho” ministers she looked up to and go around giving orders, making everybody toe the line and have an iron grip on my children and on finances. I knew it was an

unreal fantasy she would hate if she actually had it, but rationality didn't enter into her "true believer" thinking.

If we didn't have the perfect household held up as the ideal, it had to be my fault because I was to be head of my home like God was of the universe.

She would often call me up asking about some nice dress or something else she had seen and wanted. I'd nearly always tell her to go ahead, and we would find a way to cover it. I'm that way to this day and not one bit ashamed of it. My present wife loves that quality in me, though she has worked all her life and has her own income. She still appreciates my generous spirit and doesn't try to abuse it.

Sandra never missed a chance to question my manhood – often to my face and in the presence of our children. Many men without the constraints of my religious faith and my sense of responsibility would have walked out.

I was informed, I think by my wife, that the opinion of my boss and his assistant hadn't changed.

From the standpoint of the non-thinking, ass-kissing sycophant one had to be to meet what had developed into the standard of conversion in that organization, they were right.

But, I knew my heart and the depth of my original commitment. So did Herman Hoeh.

I have since reflected that becoming a minister in that church was very similar to becoming a "made man" in another famous and very authoritative organization. Looking back now, I feel fortunate that they never bestowed that questionable honor on me.

Hurtful as it was at the time, I think Sandra had a big part in keeping that from happening. Nor was there a chance for any other advancement in the organization under those circumstances.

At least I didn't have even greater pressure to turn into a mindless zombie spouting authoritative nonsense to brainwashed people.

My wife was not an evil woman. She, like the rest of us, was a "true believer," and she believed what she was doing was right.

Chapter 17

Tithing was an especially important requirement of all church members.

In addition to the first ten percent of one's income (before taxes, as this obligation took precedence over the requirements of manmade governments), Herbert had read something in the Jewish apocrypha written by a Jew who paid three different tithes.

The first tithe was to support the priesthood.

A second tithe, set aside by the tithe payer, financed attendance at the annual festivals.

A third tithe, paid every third and sixth year of a seven year cycle, was a sort of social security given to the priesthood for the support of widows, orphans and eligible Levites.

He soon found ample scriptural evidence to back up three different tithes for three different purposes. The paying of those three tithes was an absolute requirement for all church members.

Whether or not such a three-tiered tithing system actually existed in ancient Israel, I'm not sure. The Old Testament is such a confusing blend of different writings and traditions put together, edited and translated so many times by individuals with varying agendas that determining the exact facts is sometimes impossible.

There is a bit of truth to the old saying that you can prove anything by the Bible.

The fact that the only biblically qualified recipients of tithes were functioning priests and levites in a temple-centered Jewish state was gotten around by proclaiming the ministers of the church "Spiritual Levites."

There is no record in the new testament of Christians tithing to their ministry. Jesus told his followers to give any tithes they had to the temple priesthood. All of that was conveniently ignored.

That scripture only required tithes of livestock and agricultural produce that could be stored and kept by the priests for their sustenance was also ignored.

Religious Jews of today do not tithe anything since there is no functioning priesthood -- in a dedicated temple -- in the land of Israel -- to receive those tithes.

Tithing worked a considerable hardship on many church members, especially the third tithe. In my latter years with the organization, I often wondered how we could justify such a requirement of people who were

already paying into a Social Security system set up by the government of the United States.

Of course, we were assured that God would bless us to overflowing for our obedience to His law. Those promises tended to grow rather thin when so many in the church, including myself and my wife, were reduced to searching through thrift stores like rag pickers to clothe ourselves and our families.

The annual festivals, especially the Feast of Tabernacles were touted to members as “God’s vacation plan for his people.” In the early days, before many congregations existed, the custom began to hold two services each day to benefit people who had no congregation to attend. That soon became a tradition that was not changed after local churches became more prevalent.

It was very hard to find any time to relax at these observances, especially if you were one of the members also helping with things like parking, ushering and maintenance. After attending his first Feast of Tabernacles, a member from Indiana commented to his wife, “That was no vacation!”

Ministers were given two weeks of compensating paid vacation at another time of the year to make up for serving at the Feast of Tabernacles. Most of them did put in a lot of time, but not any more so than numerous others who worked for the organization and were not in the ministry. Their only paid time off was the two weeks allowed for the festival itself.

Chapter 18

The requirements to adhere to Old Testament ordinances became stricter as influential new ministers began to have input into the organization's doctrines.

For example, people soon began to be concerned about such things as nylon reinforcement in socks and the buying of other blended fabrics because of the prohibition of mingled fibers in garments.

Like the Jews of old, there seemed to be a competition to see who could come up with more "Talmudic" requirements, clarifications and strictures. I shake my head in wonderment today to think that I took such things so seriously at that time.

During the mid-sixties, a doctrinal decision was made against women wearing makeup.

There was no direct command anywhere in the Bible against makeup, but there were references to women painting their faces and making up their eyes. The fact that most of those women portrayed in the bible weren't of the most upright character, like Jezebel, was used to condemn the practice.

It was denounced in no uncertain terms as a practice of harlots.

Most of the "proof" was taken from comments in Bible commentaries, like that of Adam Clarke.

Faithful female church members threw away all their lipstick, eye shadow, etc.

For months, Mr. Armstrong hardly carried on a conversation in which the horrible practice of wearing makeup didn't come up. You can read the reasoning behind his teaching and the quotes from the commentaries by going to the following web address:

http://www.churchofgodfaithfulflock.com/Archive/Armstrong_truth_makeup.html.

About the time I left the organization, 1974-75, this extreme approach was abandoned. Confused church members would have been well advised to brace themselves. They were in for even more serious "doctrinal whiplash."

Some splinter groups, such as the one sponsoring the link above, still hold to the original makeup doctrine.

Extreme approaches appeal to certain personalities. In my view, that does not make them evil. They can be some of the finest people in the world as far as their overall character is concerned.

Chapter 19

We arrived in New York and finally found the pastor's residence in the Bronx. We rented an upstairs apartment with a separate entrance from an old couple on Bayside Avenue in Flushing.

We had hardly gotten settled when it was time to take off for Texas and the festival. By this time, there was no doubt that my bride was pregnant and we were happy to find that she was not prone to morning sickness.

My duties were to help the pastor with all aspects of his ministry. I visited and counseled members and prospective members. I gave short, and occasionally full, sermons, edited the local church newspaper and filled in wherever requested.

We found a doctor who was open to home births, and our daughter, Ann, was born in our Flushing apartment May 22, 1961. We wanted to do everything naturally and believed breastfeeding was the only way to go. It soon became apparent that this was not an option for Ann's mother, and we reluctantly had to resort to bottles and formula. It was beginning to dawn on me that a dogmatic approach to everything just didn't work.

Anyone who has spent a summer on Long Island knows it is no picnic in July and August. Temperatures soar into the high nineties and so does the humidity. We did not have air conditioning and sleeping was next to impossible until we borrowed a fan. The first night, the fan chilled us and brought on severe colds.

Living in New York City for nearly a year and a half was a broadening experience. It was still safe at that time for white clergy to visit church members in Harlem, and I did.

The members of the local congregation were friendly, loving, sincere people. I treasure memories of so many of them and often wonder how their lives went and whether many of them are still living.

I received no pay increase to compensate for living expenses in New York. Making ends meet was a struggle, and I had only the one suit that had served me ever since my high school graduation. Constant pressing soon had the fibers so scorched that holes started developing. As soon as my tax refund came in early 1961, I bought a new suit, but still had only one.

I had no overcoat to wear around New York City that winter. Just a suit coat wasn't very warm. I did have an expense account, and I put everything I could justify on that. The reimbursement for mileage on my car was the only thing that kept us solvent.

This unconcern about our financial needs began to build resentments in my mind, but I was so fanatically dedicated that I squelched them and made any excuse I could think of to sublimate the issue. I had a terror of ending up bitter and “lost.”

That is how religions have maintained control for millenniums. All they had to do was instigate enough fear of damnation in their adherents and those intimidated people would do anything required of them to avoid that horrible end.

I describe it as: “paying, praying and kissing ass.”

It’s the best con game around!

Chapter 20

In early January of 1962, the pastor of the New York City church was absent to attend the annual minister's conference in Pasadena. I, as unordained assistant pastor, was in charge during his absence.

Before he left, he had anointed and prayed for a little African American girl who was very ill and running a high fever.

I received an urgent call from the girl's mother a morning or two after his departure, tearfully telling me that she thought her daughter had died. I rushed to their apartment on the east side of Manhattan.

On arrival, I found the little girl cold and lifeless on the living room couch. In my fervent zeal, I desperately believed it was possible to restore her to life if my faith was sufficient and I prayed earnestly for her to be restored to life.

But, this little girl wasn't in a coma or faint.

She was stone cold dead, and she remained that way.

Reluctantly, the mother called for an ambulance and I left with her two little boys who were going with me to their grandmother's home. I passed the police and ambulance personnel as I left the elevator with the children.

The ministers and church members knew they were very vulnerable to criminal prosecution because of the church's extreme teaching on healing, medicine, etc. All ministers and members did their best to keep adverse publicity and possible legal action at bay when things went terribly wrong, as they did that day.

As soon as I left, the little girl's mother told me later, she removed all church literature from sight and hid it. There was nothing visible to arouse suspicion in the authorities as to why she hadn't been under medical care.

Today, I see clearly what a horrible teaching and practice that was and how deluded and brainwashed we all were. It was not an isolated occurrence. That kind of thing happened hundreds of times all over the nation and around the world as the church spread to other continents.

I gave it my all, but the local pastor and church administrators decided during that conference that my talents would be better suited to other aspects of the ministry. I was transferred back to Pasadena to resume work in answering mail and helping with publications.

Just before we were to leave for California, a rod bearing in the 1953 Buick I had bought after graduation went out and we were without transportation. It was not feasible to repair it, so I signed the title over to a young man in the church. I think he was able to sell it for parts.

I managed to arrange for a drive away car to Kansas City where we would pick up another to California. We packed it full and left in a snowstorm

Chapter 21

Back in California, we managed to find a one bedroom upstairs apartment a couple miles from the campus, and I returned to work answering mail. This apartment was adequate while Ann was a baby but we soon had to find a larger place we could afford when our second child was on the way and soon to be delivered. We located a roomier duplex farther from the campus but at about the same rent.

Birthing presented problems. An Adventist doctor in Glendale delivered numerous babies for church members who wanted home delivery. There was also a Spanish nurse-midwife in Los Angeles who handled home deliveries for a reasonable fee.

We opted for the midwife. She delivered our two sons, Eugene and Michael, and proved very competent during both deliveries. She protected herself by having a back-up physician available if there should be complications.

Finances were a constant problem. I was still being paid the same wage I earned after graduation and paychecks were usually late because more was going out than the organization was taking in, partly due to the rapid addition of more and more radio outlets.

Mr. Armstrong kept boasting that every aspect of “the work” grew at an annual rate of 30%, doubling in size and scope about every two and one-half years. Some individual department heads within the organization felt their aspects of the effort should grow at the same rate, leading to some unnecessary budgetary expansion. It was getting frustrating to everybody, no matter how dedicated, to have to constantly badger the business office for a paycheck.

None of these hardships on employees seemed to overly concern Herbert Armstrong. He owned a fine home in eastern Pasadena and had his groceries delivered and billed by one of the finest stores in the area.

I learned years later that his trash containers were always loaded with several empty Harvey’s Bristol Cream bottles. Many who were close to him have stated that he was a closet alcoholic who couldn’t get to sleep unless he had several stiff drinks.

Knowing what I now know, I'm not surprised. If I had as much on my conscience as I'm sure Herbert had, I'd have trouble sleeping also.

Finally, drastic action was called for, and Vern Mattson, whether any of the situation was his fault or not, took the fall. Albert J. Portune, a former

businessman, became the new business manager and took immediate steps to put everything on a firm financial footing.

There were numerous layoffs and budgets got scrutinized and trimmed. The days of late paychecks ended. Soon the organization had one of the highest credit ratings given to non-profit corporations.

That did not mean pay scales improved. Raises were few to non-existent for those not in the higher positions.

Top executives actual salaries were often rather low. But, they had such things as nice homes, free lease cars and several other “perks” given to them. They could then say to employees who inquired about raises that they couldn’t pay them more than they were getting.

Prosperity and living standards depend as much on the “outgo” as the “income.”

A Personnel Department was established to set wage scales, but most of us noticed no change. It was very frustrating to have some individuals I felt were way below me in talent, ability and skills paid far more than I was to tell me, and others, what we were worth.

They tried to determine wages by standards in other businesses. That was like comparing apples to oranges since what most of us were doing had no direct counterpart in other enterprises. We suspected that the worth of what we were doing was being severely downgraded.

Chapter 22

I remember one time when I desperately needed a pair of shoes and couldn't find a good secondhand pair my size in any of the thrift stores. The smallest size I could wear was a 12, and a 13 was even better. Those sizes were not very common in thrift stores.

I went to a store that had a really good sale and bought two pairs of nice shoes while I could find my size at a great price. I paid a total of \$30.

They looked great. I was as happy as a little kid over my new shoes and proud that I had gotten a bargain. I guess I showed everyone.

When the administrators of my department learned of the "extravagant" amount I had spent on shoes, they lectured me sternly on my spendthrift ways.

My boss, asked me to show him my budget one time, and I wrote it out for him. He responded that it didn't look like I really had a budget, just a memory of how I spent my money.

At the same time, he was living in a church supplied house, driving a leased car, etc. He probably had a wonderful looking budget.

I had thought we, and others like us, were doing rather well in making our funds stretch. We had food cooperatives going to buy in bulk and divide up what was purchased. We stretched our food budgets by mixing powdered milk with whole milk, found ways to extend butter, etc. Thrift stores were the home away from home to many of us.

I ran a couple of those food cooperatives out of my home.

Once every week, I got up about 3 am and headed to the Los Angeles wholesale market where I bought fruits and vegetables to fill orders placed in advance. During noon hour I would divide it all up in a parking lot and sell any excess I could to anyone who wanted it. It worked out rather well and cut a lot of grocery bills rather significantly while providing excellent nutrition.

For a number of months, I did the same with cheese. Again, I would take orders and during a noon hour speed to a wholesale supplier and buy huge blocks of cheddar. I had covered a table with vinyl and equipped it with a lever and wire to cut those blocks into smaller pieces that people came by to pick up.

I guess it was expected that we eat even more macaroni and beans to save a few more bucks that would probably go to answer the next urgent request for funds to keep "God's work" going. The Owner of the universe seemed to have budget problems too, at least according to what those coworker letters kept saying.

At the same time, Garner Ted would take lavish trips to Las Vegas with his closest pals and usually a secret coed girlfriend or two and drop considerable money at the blackjack tables. I think his “budget” could have used some scrutiny.

To even suggest such a thing about one of God’s earthly spokesmen would have been considered the height of sacrilegious impertinence.

A comment Herbert Armstrong made in a Sabbath service toward the end of my career made his approach abundantly clear. He was commenting on an elaborate home that had been provided for one of the ranking ministers and said that there were some people he “wanted to have nice things.”

I was stunned.

Apparently, the rest of us were on a level with “chopped liver.” The mouth really does speak from the abundance of the heart.

For about three years after my return from New York, it was totally impossible for me to purchase and maintain an automobile. Around town, we walked, went with a friend or took a bus. For longer trips, we had to borrow a car from a church member who lived nearby. A good friend and his wife took us with them to the fall festival then held in Squaw Valley, California.

We got by, but it was a very difficult and humiliating lifestyle only someone with my level of “unconverted” dedication could have endured.

Finally, a church member and Korean War vet, saw us walking one too many times and signed over the title to a Dodge station wagon he owned and didn’t need.

I could barely maintain it and didn’t have insurance for several years, but our walking days were over! My experience on the farm gave me enough mechanical knowledge to enable me to do most maintenance myself, but I had to borrow tools.

Raises that did come through often did not keep up with inflation. There were also times when a small raise put me in a higher withholding bracket and my take home pay actually went down.

By the late sixties, things improved a bit since my wife did babysitting for working mothers and the extra income took some pressure off.

Chapter 23

The belief in the church and college was that anyone who had come to and been accepted by Ambassador College had received a “call.” Unless those at the top decided that you were not destined for that calling, leaving of your own free will constituted rejecting your “call” and you would be cursed.

For many years, I accepted that belief. As the obvious inequalities, injustices, and doctrinal discrepancies and errors became more and more apparent, my acceptance became harder and harder to maintain.

The “Beast” should have had the world trembling before it by that time, and it was nowhere on the world scene. Nazism and Fascism had not revived to bring back the Holy Roman Empire of ten nations or groups of nations. The United States was more prosperous and powerful than ever before, not in the throes of depression and ruin.

Our main foe was still the Soviet Union, and mutually assured destruction had kept those pragmatic communists at bay. They were not fanatical enough to destroy the world so they could inherit the cinders, if they would be around to inherit anything at all. We would be well off to have enemies with that kind of good sense and restraint today.

Mrs. Armstrong fell ill in 1967, apparently of a severe bowel blockage. She did not want medical intervention and trusted to prayer, enemas and diet to treat her condition.

After weeks of illness, she died.

It has been said by some that as soon as she was gone, Herbert Armstrong went on a trip and never really came back.

He fancied himself a modern Elijah, proclaiming himself “God’s ambassador for world peace – without portfolio.” He went on a campaign to meet and preach to world leaders, using the lavish private jet the church owned as his home away from home.

I found it kind of laughable the kind of world leaders he bragged about reaching. For the most part, they were inconsequential rulers and officials of third world countries, like Kitikachorn of Thailand, and former royalty like the former king of Belgium.

When he was with these “leaders,” he couched his addresses and conversations in terminology that he maintained was preaching the gospel but rarely quoted anything directly from the Bible.

The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation (AICF) was set up and millions of tithe payers’ dollars were channeled into it to finance these visits, gifts of fine Steuben Crystal, etc. to high level dignitaries, elaborate

dinners and a host of concerts at the opulent new auditorium (the “House for God”) that had been built on Ambassador campus.

Many members and employees could see no real value or any real connection with proclaiming the gospel to the world in any of this. I know one close blind friend who always made his wife write on checks to the organization: “not to be used for AICF.”

Things were beginning to get a bit “dicey” in the late sixties and early seventies.

I saw more and more clearly that there was something drastically amiss in our understanding of divorce and remarriage. If our extreme stance was really correct, what in the world was it that Ezra and Nehemiah were doing in breaking up all those marriages? Where was the principle of “everlasting faithfulness” in that?

Our semantic games about differences between premarital fornication and marital adultery and their bearing on marriage termination began to make less and less sense. Others, including many ministers, were beginning to have serious questions as well.

Chapter 24

Herbert Armstrong had often commented that he found it impossible to work with his former associates and decided he had to establish Ambassador College and train young men in the “truth.”

This served him well for nearly twenty years.

What he didn't take into account was the fact that young men mature and start to do their own thinking, just like those older men he couldn't get along with. As we moved into our mid-thirties and approached forty, the questions started developing and fully adult individuals aren't as easily impressed by claims of authority.

Many of my fellow coworkers in what was then called The Personal Correspondence Department and in other parts of the organization were becoming more and more disturbed. Such feelings cannot be long hidden from scrutiny in any organization. Our department was one of the hotbeds of discontent, and that fact was not lost on those at the top.

One morning, shortly before the raw fertilizer encountered the atmospheric circulator the second time over Garner Ted's immoral lifestyle, a meeting was announced and we were told that our department was being disbanded.

This was a great shock, to say the least. We had dedicated our lives to what we were doing, and felt that our function was a necessary part of “the work.” We still held to the conviction that it was really God's work in need of some course correction.

We were suddenly, in our late thirties and early forties, left with the necessity of looking for jobs in the world at large. We were given a week's pay for every year we had worked for the organization and free assistance in writing resumes, plus free printing.

We faced the daunting task of finding a job with an unaccredited (at that time) bachelor's degree and absolutely no experience in the commercial world.

Since I would be looking for a job, I took some of my severance pay and bought a suit, a sport coat and a nice pair of slacks. I hadn't had a new suit in ages, just used ones that fit me somewhat. One of the ministers saw me dropping my children off at school, looked at me and said, “I'm impressed.”

Of course he was impressed.

I didn't look like a rag picker anymore!

I found a job selling correspondence courses for LaSalle University. That did not work out and my severance pay was rapidly disappearing

Our landlord had a daughter and son-in-law who owned a carpet cleaning company in Costa Mesa. They suggested that I contact them, as they were looking for someone to train as a manager. I did and was hired. For nearly a year, I mastered the skill of steam cleaning carpets, but the commute was a killer.

I decided to try selling insurance and went to work with the same company a fellow ex-employee had joined. That lasted about six months. By that time, it became clear that I could not generate enough business to justify the salary they were advancing me, and I was out of work again.

My time with the carpet cleaning company had given me a skill I knew was in demand. I had gotten to know and had become friends with a printer across the street from the office building from which the insurance company rented space. I also knew the owner of a janitorial supply company in Arcadia.

The owner of the Janitorial supply sold me a small steam cleaning machine on credit and my first supply of chemicals on one month's credit. The printer gave me a month's credit on 5,000 fliers that I had created. I put the machine and supplies in my 1968 Ford sedan and set out to build my own business.

I was just past forty years of age and still in my prime. I would go out about five in the morning and distribute fliers door to door for two to three hours. After breakfast, I would take the calls that came in and do as many cleaning jobs as I could for the rest of the day.

My first partial month, I took in over \$2000. I had never had so much money! This was in 1975! Two thousand dollars was equal to three or four times that in today's economy. I started paying cash for fliers and chemicals and soon had the machine paid for.

It felt good to take my children skating and to go out to eat without worrying about every dollar I spent. Things were looking bright.

Chapter 25

It was then that my wife hit me with a bombshell.

She had been talking to the church leadership and had convinced them that she had grounds for divorce. They were already beginning to loosen up in the divorce and remarriage area.

The fact that I had turned into a renegade enemy in their eyes didn't help any.

She was determined to file for divorce and asked me to move out.

I found a studio apartment and moved out with my phone, which was my business lifeline.

Those were rough days and the one time in my life when I seriously contemplated suicide. That didn't last long. I am not the kind of person who will abandon his responsibilities that easily. I had four children who needed my support if they were to survive.

I did not oppose the divorce. Sandra did not ask for alimony. There was no property to divide, and I was totally willing to support my children.

In a few months, the decree came through, and I carried on with my life.

Making child support payments with a fluctuating income presented difficulties, but I always managed, even if it was late.

Soon, my older daughter, Ann, had enough of her mother's autocratic rule and moved in with me, and right after her, the two boys wanted to live with me also. I certainly couldn't have three others with me in a studio apartment.

Sandra saw she was not going to be able to hold onto them and offered to let me have the house she was renting from a longtime friend of ours. She would move into a studio apartment with our youngest daughter, Nancy, who was about three.

I agreed.

Trying to run a business and a single parent household for my three oldest children was a daunting task. Both of my boys got into trouble in their teens and spent some time incarcerated. All of my children have since developed into responsible, law-abiding adults.

I feel no rancor toward my ex-wife. Our marriage was probably another youthful mistake made more likely by the requirement to marry inside the church. Despite the tension and incompatibility, my innate stubbornness and dedication to honor and duty would have probably kept me in the union far longer, and it would not have been happy.

In my opinion, she did me a huge favor by forcing me to accept a reality I was resisting. Divorce is sometimes the only logical answer. That's why rational laws and rational religious doctrines allow for it.

I recall what the long-time friend we were renting the house from said one night when I was complaining about the looming divorce.

She turned to me and asked, "Do you want it (my marriage) at *any* price?"

Business was good much of the time, but anyone who has been in business knows there are difficult times when it is hard to survive. Those times came to me also.

I remember one particularly difficult period when I was struggling to keep up with everything and wondering if I shouldn't just give up and find another job. I was driving down the freeway, mulling it over.

The thought made me angry.

I pounded on the steering wheel and shouted, "I'm not going down!" I made the right choice and found a way to survive.

Chapter 26

I broke off completely with the church that had monopolized my life and thinking for over twenty years. For a few years, I maintained contact with the Foundation for Biblical Research, started by Dr. Ernest Martin. He had also left the organization over doctrinal differences. When I felt they became too dogmatic in some areas, I broke off with them as well.

Just before I quit associating with them, I went to a meeting with a girlfriend I was seeing. She was a smoker, and one of the self-righteous old “biddies” from former Worldwide took it upon herself to reprimand her for defiling God’s house. It was a rented motel conference room with an outdoor balcony on which she had lit up. I think that’s the last formal meeting of theirs I ever attended.

I investigated everything with a questioning mind. Reincarnation became a deep study. I read widely on the subject and on survival after death. There is still much on those subjects that pose deep questions to my inquiring mind. The work of John Edward, whose TV episodes I have watched extensively, leads me to believe there is survival after death, but not in the traditional heaven or hell scenario.

As John Edward points out, any existence on the “other side” would be one of pure energy without a physical body through which physical communication is possible. Only a select group of people have the ability to cross into that dimension. I certainly don’t.

I’ve never seen a ghost, but my second wife claimed to have seen many, especially when she lived in Tombstone. So did her daughter who apparently inherited some of her sensitivities. I know this is all anecdotal and improvable, but I can’t dismiss it out of hand.

While carpet cleaning in Hollywood, one of my customers persuaded me to go with him to the Scientology headquarters, and they managed to sign me up for their Introductory “communications” course. It was quite an experience.

Because of my cultic exposure of the past, I saw right through their attempt to rope me in. I drove them nuts by dragging out what they wanted to do in a few days to weeks and went when I jolly well felt like it. I especially enjoyed frustrating them in their “bull baiting” sessions. They never could break me down and they were obviously upset that I was better at “confronting” their attempts than they were at “confronting” me.

Finally, I completed the “course,” and expected to receive my certificate of completion. I soon realized they weren’t going to give me a certificate unless and until I signed up for the next course. Finally, I stated

that fact to the fellow and he affirmed that was true. I looked him squarely in the eye and firmly stated, "No!" He just stared at me. I guess he needed a few more courses to get himself "clear" enough so he could "confront" someone like me. I finally said I had to go and excused myself.

They just don't give up. For years, I received mailings, phone calls, etc. trying to rope me in. I sent big mailings back in their postpaid envelopes, insulted them, etc., etc. It didn't stop until I moved to Phoenix and left no forwarding address. Scientology is just as bad, or worse than, Worldwide ever was. They are just as convinced that they have the one and only real truth. A "truth" dreamed up by a science fiction writer. What a financial bonanza he created for himself.

My experience with them was an eye-opener, and I've never regretted the \$50 I spent to gain insight into their program.

When Neale Donald Walsch published his Conversations with God series of books, I read them all and found much in them that registered as reasonable and logical. However, I'm not prepared to accept that there really is such a deity who communicates with Neale through automatic writing. I could just as easily claim such authority for my writings and musings.

I'm no longer a follower, so I don't make a great effort to get involved and active in anything.

That includes the Humanist Society, which I was associated with for a while just before moving to Cottonwood. I've toyed with association with the Unitarian Universalists, but I have difficulty building any enthusiasm for doing so. I'm certain association with such an organization would open up business contacts, but that seems to me an hypocritical and self-serving reason for seeking them out.

I still felt a need for fellowship in those early years and began attending a Divine Science church in Arcadia in 1975 and '76, until the minister started advocating tithing. I wrote her a letter stating that tithing for Christians was not only unscriptural; it was scripturally illegal. I didn't receive a reply and stopped that association soon after.

I was beginning to see that maintaining a spiritual attitude had nothing to do with churches. It seemed to me that money was the main motivating factor governing what most, if not all, churches and religious organizations did and taught.

Nothing has changed my opinion in the interim.

I have reflected a great deal on the development of world religions and am no more impressed with what I see than was Thomas Paine when he wrote *Age of Reason*. Christianity was developed by a Benjamite Jew with psychological problems who had some sort of fit on the road to Damascus

and subsequently went to Arabia where he says he was instructed directly by Jesus.

Another psychopath, this time directly from Arabia, spent a lot of time holed up in a cave and then set out to spread his new religion touting an all powerful god called Allah by the power of humanly wielded swords. His followers are still at it, and they never seem to be able to ask themselves why they have to risk everything going to war on behalf of an all powerful deity. If he's so powerful, why do his followers have to show his "love" by blowing themselves and hosts of others with similar and differing opinions to smithereens?

Then, there was a deranged guy, in the mold of Mohammad, Joseph Smith, from New York, who got messages and supposed golden plates from an angel named Moroni. That gave rise to the Mormon religion.

In the mid-1800s, along came a prophetess by the name of Ellen G. White who's stock in trade was "visions." She set in motion the Seventh Day Adventists and their doctrinal and prophetic nonsense. Numerous splinters followed, such as the Church of God Seventh Day, The Branch Davidians, the Worldwide Church of God and hundreds of splinters from it.

I am not acquainted with the origin of all significant Christian religious organizations and organizational families, but I'm convinced that, beginning with Paul, they all hark back to some degree of delusion and psychological malfunction.

Chapter 27

I soon got into square dancing and joined a singles club. This opened up the social contacts I needed to find another mate with a compatible personality. In 1979, I met and soon married Joyce Foster.

I continued building my business and Joyce worked as a delivery driver for the Los Angeles school district. Both of us were getting tired of smog related respiratory problems, and the dampness from the nearby ocean was not good for her arthritis.

We began thinking of relocation. After a trip to Arizona, we decided to move to Phoenix.

I wanted to sell my business but had nothing but a list of customers and phone numbers to offer. The thought occurred to me that the distance to Phoenix made trips back and forth feasible. So, I sent a letter to all the customers I had record of, telling them that I was moving to the desert for health reasons. I asked them to return a short questionnaire if they wanted me to continue serving their carpet cleaning needs.

Over three hundred responded, and I made at least two trips to Pasadena every year for five years to serve those customers. I was able to stay at my sister's home in Pasadena and make use of her phone. I was still getting new customer referrals in that fifth year.

When my youngest daughter, Nancy, then 13, visited us, she decided not to return to her mother. This led to a dispute with Joyce, and she decided to separate from me because of it.

I was determined to get my daughter out of the controlling atmosphere she had been in when she lived in California and reluctantly let the relationship with my wife go on the rocks.

Joyce eventually moved to and bought property in Tombstone. I went down to visit her every few weeks until her death in 1995. We never divorced.

This is another part of my life I'm not bitter about. I understood Joyce's feelings, even though I thought she did the wrong thing. The nine years we were separated allowed me much time for personal study, reflection and growth.

It isn't what happens in one's life that determines the ultimate outcome. The important thing is how you handle and deal with those happenstances.

In 1994, Joyce was diagnosed with lung cancer. She had quit smoking after a near fatal case of pneumonia a couple of years previously,

but it was too late. The disease was probably already active but not yet detectable. She died May 6, 1995.

I had already experienced divorce.

Now, I was a widower.

Chapter 28

I thought I might remain single the rest of my life. Marriages hadn't been the greatest successes in my life.

But, I was tired of living alone. I wanted someone to share life with and made a mental list of what I wanted in a partner. I knew from the past that some of the best prospects for a mate were to be found in an activity like square dancing.

By mid-June, I had located a couple of square dance clubs and was soon back dancing. Classes for new dancers began in September, and I attended those classes as an experienced helper.

Soon I noticed a lady student about my age with a terrific personality who was obviously highly intelligent and capable.

One of the musts on my list was an intellectual and educational level somewhere close to my own. She was an ASU graduate and worked in public relations in the director's office of AHCCS, the Arizona version of Medicaid.

I almost "blew it" when I happened to mention having graduated from a religious college in casual conversation. She told me later that her first thought was, "I'm going to give this one a big miss."

We had our first date in early November. Everything clicked. She soon learned I wasn't some religious fanatic after all. On December 10, we were married at a square dance.

The past 10 years plus of my life have been the happiest and most fulfilling of all. If there is such a thing as a soul mate, Phyllis and I are soul mates.

We share the same basic attitudes and convictions. Neither of us is religious in the usual sense, but we are both ordained interfaith, non-condemnatorial ministers. We almost instinctively understand each other and work together with great harmony.

Phyllis is also a writer and has written and published a romantic novel by the title, *The President's Woman*. She is working on two other books. One is another romantic novel, *What Would Willow Do?* The second recounts her life experiences in adopting and rearing a Yavapai Apache son. Its title is *Paleface Mother*. We help each other by editing and critiquing each other's work.

It was in 1997 that I decided to go into officiating marriages.

I often take walks to meditate about things that are on my mind. I had been wondering what else I could do for extra income and personal fulfillment. It came to me on one of those walks that doing weddings would

be a perfect occupation I could pursue even after I no longer could work in flooring.

Checking soon revealed that any ordained minister could legally officiate a marriage ceremony in Arizona. I still had the belief that some established organization had to ordain me, so I began searching.

I learned of an interfaith group in Louisiana that accepted all my college credits (those credits were now accredited since Ambassador College had sought and received accreditation after my graduation in 1960). After a few units of required correspondence courses, I was approved for ordination at their conference the last week in September.

I was ordained on September 30, 1997.

I found later that I could have saved time and money by going online and getting free ordinations from several sources, or I could simply have proclaimed myself ordained.

Later, I registered our own church name, The Arizona Church of Love and Harmony, with the Secretary of State and we issued each other certificates of ordination in that name.

Most people don't realize how easy it is to adopt an aura of authority and make it stick. It does take a bit of audacity, but that comes rather easily to both Phyllis and me.

Several years ago, Phyllis registered the business name, Bodacious Business Affairs, with the Secretary of State. She then had a license plate artist make her a license plate with the word, Bodacious, on it. We proudly display that plate on the front of our van.

“Bodacious” is, I believe, a word coined by southern Americans that means “bold and audacious.”

I don't regret getting the ordination as I did. It was an additional learning experience, and the organization has not been intrusive in any way. I am free to carry on whatever ministry I choose in my own way as long as I conduct myself ethically. I don't have to espouse any creed or pledge loyalty to any belief system.

The trip to Louisiana was our first opportunity for a honeymoon, and we got to spend several days in pre-Katrina New Orleans.

Chapter 29

All this time, I followed as best I could the steady decline and disintegration of my old alma mater and the WCG. After 1975, I no longer considered myself a part of that organization. Thousands of others were feeling the same way and departing.

Most, like me, were still determined to remain a part of “the body of Christ.” If that entailed organizing something else, so be it.

Things accelerated in 1978 when Garner Ted was ousted by his father and set up his own organization in Tyler, Texas. Numerous members followed him.

Doctrinal changes started coming in little pieces, and that always upsets parishioners in any organization. It was nothing in comparison with the wholesale rapid changes that occurred after Herbert Armstrong’s death in 1986 and the ascent of Joseph Tkach, Sr. to the position of Pastor General, a position viewed in the organization as equal to Apostle.

I heard about his demise on the evening news and immediately poured myself a double shot of scotch to toast the occasion.

Today, the organization bears no real resemblance to the church I once served and into which I was baptized. It has abandoned most of its former teachings, including requiring observance of the seventh day Sabbath. It struggled through the process of adopting a new name and is now known as Grace Communion International.

Some years ago, my father, who was very confused with all the changes, commented to me that he might as well have remained a Methodist.

I don’t know exactly how my parents felt about my leaving Worldwide. They always refrained from interfering in my life or my sister’s life after we became adults. They took the attitude that it was up to us to ask for their advice and opinions if we wanted them. I also didn’t feel it was proper for me to preach to them about matters of faith and belief.

However, I don’t believe either of them was too enamored with Worldwide. They liked and enjoyed the friends they had met there and were on the membership role right up to their deaths.

I appreciated the fact that, a few years before they died, both of them specified in no uncertain terms that they wanted me to officiate at their funeral/memorials. I considered that a great honor and a sign that they did not condemn my decision to leave that organization.

Dozens of splinter groups have spun off from the old WCG. Some of them are almost carbon copies of the organization with which I was originally aligned.

I shake my head in wonderment when I see some of them boast and “one-up” each other about being guardians of the great “truths” Herbert W. Armstrong revealed to the world.

Chapter 30

What have I learned through these seven decades of life? Would I do some things differently if I could?

Most assuredly, yes.

But, we don't get that luxury, except in fantasies. All I can do now is recount the experiences and pass on the lessons.

I have come to espouse the opinions of Thomas Paine, as written in his *Age of Reason*, although I do not count myself a Deist, as he did of himself. Here are some thoughtful quotes from his work:

“I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

“All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit....

“Every national church or religion has established itself by pretending some special mission from God, communicated to certain individuals. The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet, as if the way to God was not open to every man alike.

“Each of those churches show certain books, which they call revelation, or the word of God. The Jews say, that their word of God was given by God to Moses, face to face; the Christians say, that their word of God came by divine inspiration: and the Turks say, that their word of God (the Koran) was brought by an angel from Heaven. Each of those churches accuse the other of unbelief; and for my own part, I disbelieve them all.”

You may read *Age of Reason* by going to this website:

<http://www.hwarmstrong.com/age-of-reason-00.htm>

Another eye opening website on the origins of Christianity and the real history of the Bible is the following:

http://www.nexusmagazine.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=70

I've learned that the most wonderful and most dangerous time in our lives is that of our youth. We are so full of life and dreams and are so cocksure of ourselves that we tend to leap into the most extreme things with reckless abandon. Our inexperience and naiveté lead us to buy into some of the most absurd teachings and assertions.

We are so determined to establish our own individual identity that we don't care if those older and wiser than we are react with horror. Sometimes, we even relish that horror. We scorn even the suggestion that what we are doing doesn't make sense.

If a voice deep inside us urges caution, we often silence it and forge ahead.

The important thing to us is having a mission and an individual and group identity that sets us apart, makes us special. I call it the "savior syndrome."

I suffered from that syndrome, just like the Nazis a generation before. It's the same syndrome that drives Muslim extremists of today. Their mission is to bludgeon and overwhelm the whole world and force it into becoming a Muslim paradise.

My mission with WCG was to do my part to usher in the divine dictatorship of the returning Jesus whose rule would solve every problem humans had. I would be part of that great Kingdom and share in that dictatorship.

All simplistic solutions to human problems seem to involve some form of fascism, either human or divine.

How thankful I am that it was all a "pipe dream!" If what I was part of became the model of a worldwide government, "hell" would have been a better name for it than "heaven."

I've realized there is a danger in believing or knowing you are highly intelligent. It can lead to the belief that you are just a little bit smarter than "the average bear" and therefore immune to deception.

I've concluded that most people believe the universe revolves around them and their peculiar definition of "God." They are certain there is a magnificent, all-powerful entity somewhere "up there" with nothing better to do than monitor them and six billion plus other humans twenty-four hours of every passing day, take note of everything they do and pass judgment on it.

Any "God" stuck with such an endeavor would be bored out of his or her skull in a very short time. Most humans live extremely boring lives ninety-some percent of the time.

Besides that, Jesus said (anyway the “book” says he said) that God marks the fall of a single sparrow. How many billion sparrows and other little birds are there on this earth? Does he monitor every sip of nectar a hummingbird takes in? Every worm a robin eats? Or just their demise after a very short and furtive life dodging all the predators?

What about those predators? Is he also monitoring them?

Such an attitude and belief was easy to come by in the micro-world our forebears inhabited. They had no inkling of the vastness of the cosmos. To them, the world consisted of what they could walk, ride, or sail to. It seldom extended beyond their little region.

The sun was a god that took a daily journey across the sky and entered an abyss at night to reappear the next day. The moon and stars were lights representing other gods that traversed the night sky.

They had no concept of an earth that was part of a great solar system inside a vast galaxy that was just one of billions of other galaxies each containing billions of stars and trillions of possibly life-filled planets.

I doubt we will ever know how many living worlds there are, even within our own galaxy. The distances are just too vast and possible speeds of travel too slow to make that possible. Future generations are doomed to also gaze at the heavens and wonder just what might still be out there undiscovered.

After all, when we see light from the most distant galaxies, we are looking back in time multiple billions of years. Those galaxies aren't even in that location now and we have no idea what has transpired in them since that light left. If the history of earth is any guide, life has come and gone in waves of development and extinction and if highly intelligent beings evolved, civilizations may have arisen and fallen millions, billions or zillions of times.

It is only in the last century that humanity has become aware of these facts, and we are discovering more each passing day. Yet, we can't seem to rid ourselves of this impossible view of cosmic reality we inherited from our sincere but sincerely uninformed ancestors. As Spock would say, “This is illogical.”

I've learned to question everything and assume nothing. I no longer assume that an ancient collection of books that both Jews and Christians argued and fought over for centuries is somehow more authoritative and holy than any other collection of myths, contrived history and sage advice.

I've learned that the more isolated, uneducated and inexperienced you are, the more likely you are to buy into the conviction that your family, your tribe, your church, your nation, etc. is somehow specially chosen of God for some great purpose. That conviction can become so strong that it is held onto far beyond the time when the belief has been amply demonstrated to be false.

Thus, old discredited religious organizations tend not to die or fade away. They just find a way to explain it all away and then quietly ignore the whole thing as new generations carry on in blissful ignorance.

Such chauvinistic beliefs have led to so much pride and resulting jealousy and hatred in human relations.

Years ago, I was told about a toast pre-war German Jews used to recite in public before their resentful German neighbors. I don't remember the exact wording, but it was to the effect that foreigners were nothing, Germans were something and Jews were everything.

That chauvinism wasn't the only cause of the holocaust, but it didn't do anything to help the situation.

I am reminded of the refugee Jew in the movie, *Exodus*, who pleads with God to "choose somebody else." If the myth of their being specially chosen had never developed, and hadn't been thrown in the face of every other tribe and nation on earth by "holy scripture," they wouldn't have had that part of the problem.

I've learned to have the courage to look into and consider the facts presented by those who have proven the Bible to be unreliable. Foremost among those works I've studied are *The Forgery of the Old Testament* and *The Myth of the Resurrection* by Joseph McCabe. Both can be ordered online from Amazon.

Again, the Internet is an invaluable asset in such research. Try this site for some thought provoking articles by a former WCG minister:

http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Dennis_Diehl.

With all the knowledge tools available, one would hope people would become less vulnerable to superstition and fraudulent claims. Sadly, I haven't seen much decline, if any. Sometimes it seems like a losing battle. Human beings almost seem to love being conned.

A great deal more than one "sucker" is born every minute. Everyone I have ever known has been a sucker for something at some time in their lives, usually several times.

I've learned that dwelling on recriminations about the past is folly. The rear view mirror is valuable, but if you don't put most of your

concentration on the windshield, you're not going to get where you're going safely.

One of the hardest tasks I've had in writing this account is clearly remembering my experiences. I've probably left out some things I'll later wish had been put in. I haven't thought about many of the things that occurred in my past in any detail for decades. It would have been a waste of time to do so and it would have created unnecessary pain.

The old adage, "No use crying over spilt milk," applies here. I'm no masochist.

I've learned that human beings create their "gods" in their images, not the other way around. If there is a God, it cannot be the patriarchal, egotistical, vengeful oriental despot so much of the world claims to worship and calls a "god of love." If that were the true picture of God, then Saddam Hussein, Hitler and Stalin were saints.

Whether he is called Jehovah, Allah or something else, history has shown him to be a god of hate and intolerance.

That concept of God came straight out of what is called the cradle of civilization. The Jews returning from Babylon brought that Zoroastrian religion with them, blended it with their tribal legends and put a Jewish spin on it. Then, they used it as the basis for their largely fictional religious writings.

They had done the same thing with Egyptian monotheism generations before. There was a constant struggle in ancient Israel between polytheism and monotheism, just as there had been a struggle between the two philosophies in Egypt.

The oppressive societies that created that "god" still exist in those same areas today, and the free and scientifically enlightened nations of the West are in a life and death struggle with them. Those societies would do well to get to hell out of the "cradle" and grow up. They never will as long as they worship that murderous and hateful "god."

If the "god" I used to worship, and most of the world still worships, is real, stop the universe! I want off!

I've learned that any "god" that is dependent on me to defend him and do his work is a travesty, not a god.

A deity that is so emotionally needy as to require the constant fawning of either heavenly or earthly creatures is in need of a psychiatrist, not a worshiper.

Any "god" that would consider everlasting torture of his "child" to be a just punishment is an ogre in a dungeon, not a god.

The “god” pictured in such a religion is pure fiction. Such a “god” cannot exist in a sane universe.

I’ve learned that damnation and salvation was the invention of practitioners of priest craft to keep the populace in a pliable state of fear. It came in at the time crafty con men pushed the original mother goddess aside and instituted their bad tempered, despotic patriarchal deities. It put those crafty con artists in the position of authority they craved so they could indulge their appetite for an easy life of power and wealth – and often, sex.

I’ve learned that there was no original sin, no damnation, no need for a savior.

Mythology is loaded with martyred god-man saviors. The concept did not begin with Jesus and the Jews. Paul’s assertion that salvation was of the Jews was a chauvinistic misrepresentation. People, including many Jews, were turning to a multitude of saviors for salvation centuries before.

Human beings have no need for a savior!

Never did!

Never will!

I’ve learned that evolution is more than a theory. It’s a fact. If everything was started by something we can call “god,” evolution is the mechanism that god has used.

I’ve learned it is folly to set ancient tribal ordinances and taboos as guides for my daily life. Every tribal society on earth has its own enthroned requirements and prohibitions that are attributed to their deities. Most of them are based on the personal beliefs and prejudices of a now forgotten shaman who may well have been a little bit wacko.

I’ve learned that religion often is the greatest divider and enemy of man, followed closely by politics. It can easily take highly intelligent, otherwise decent human beings and turn them into unthinking monsters. All the while, those deluded individuals are absolutely convinced that they are a special kind of “GI” – God’s Issue.

I’ve learned to govern my life by what makes sense and is kind, honest and ethical. I have no problem with “love your neighbor as yourself.” That admonition, in one form or another, is found in all the great moral teachings. It makes sense. So do all other ethical precepts that keep human beings from oppressing and misusing each other.

It is a fallacy to believe that only individuals in abject fear of a deity can act morally and ethically. History proves that blind submission to such beliefs usually leads to the exact opposite outcome.

If someone really believes he or she cannot avoid raping, pillaging and running amok in the world without the fear of divine retribution, I wonder about their basic psychological makeup.

Chapter 31

Whether you applaud or curse my conclusions, they are my sincerely held opinions. I am thankful to live in a nation where I can express those opinions freely without fear of retribution from the “authorities.” That freedom was dearly bought and paid for by men like Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and a host of others, most of whom are now forgotten. They were human, fallible, questioning men dedicated to guaranteeing we would all be free to question and seek without fear.

Your reaction will be based on your opinions, and I have noticed that every human being who is reasonably intelligent has a whole head full of opinions. Therefore, personal opinions are not really rare and precious items, except maybe, to the opinion holder.

I freely acknowledge that I am an agnostic.

There may very well be something at the basis of this universe that can be called “God.” I long ago decided that the best description of any such entity would be the American Indian appellation, “The Great Spirit.”

Call it “universal consciousness” or whatever makes sense to you.

Or, call it nothing and reject it. But, remember that your understanding is limited and subject to fallibility.

I was once cocksure and convinced that what I then believed was the absolute truth.

That house of cards collapsed.

It had no real foundation.

I don’t mind saying, “I don’t know.” That’s what “agnostic” means.

I’ve learned that it takes more courage to say I don’t know than to shout assumed verities from rooftops and strut around as some authority or guru.

I’ve long been a student of history and I know that those who proclaim that this nation was founded as a Christian nation are ignorant of the facts. As Patrick Henry, so firmly stated: “The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

Our founding fathers co-existed in a predominantly Christian environment, but a great proportion of them were Deists, agnostics and outright atheists. They were rebels in many areas other than politics. They were suspicious of churches and religion. They knew what both had done in the nations their fathers had fled, and it is precisely what some of them had fled.

That is why they were so determined to set up a government that mandated religious freedom. They never meant to endorse or prohibit any religious system, including rejection of religion, when they gave us that freedom.

Writings from different periods in their lives often seem contradictory. They were thinking men, and thinking men grow. My opinions at age twenty-one were very different from my opinions at age forty. And those would be in flat out contradiction to much of what I think today. Only non-thinking dogmatists cling to opinions that never change.

I really don't know what Jefferson and Washington thought and believed on their deathbeds. I do know that much of what they said and wrote at other times mirror what I have written here. You can find their quotes very easily by a simple online search.

To this day, that hard won freedom is being attacked on a daily basis by good, and some not-so-good, people who are certain their own religion, their own god is the only correct one. Most of those people warn that if you don't agree with them you will be horribly and cruelly punished by their "loving" god – and if some of them can arrange it, by them.

In fact the terrorists (whom I have placed in the "not-so-good" category) are willing to kill us all, not to save us, but to save and promote the worldwide dominance of their religion.

Allah has them falling on their faces five times a day from infancy on. That was a very clever brainwashing ploy by the founder of that religion. Muslims have very little time between sessions of self-brainwashing to stop, think and say, "Wait a minute. This doesn't make sense."

I know what religion did in my life, and I've learned the lesson well. There is a big difference between what is referred to as "spirituality" and religion. I seek the former. Call it whatever you wish. It's just plain trying to be a decent and basically loving, human being.

I have an interfaith ordination so that I can serve people with legal marriage ceremonies and an occasional funeral or memorial, if I can avoid mouthing ridiculous nonsense I no longer believe.

You will not find me preaching dogmatic nonsense anywhere at any time.

Chapter 32

For many years now, the poem, Invictus, by William Ernest Henley has sort of been my statement to the universe. I also have a CD by Frank Sinatra on which “My Way” is my favorite.

I want My Way played at my memorial and Invictus read.

I know. Just about every red-blooded man in America thinks “My Way” is his theme song, and some of them are kidding themselves.

I still claim it because I believe it and have tried my best to live it for over thirty years. If Dr. Phil asked, “How’s that working for you?” I would have an answer:

It has kept me from being a “wage slave” for over three decades.

It has erased a servile, whipped dog attitude from my mind.

It has made me an independent, rational thinker who is not afraid to say something doesn’t make sense, and therefore, cannot be true.

It has kept me from letting fear be my motivator.

It has made me the man I was born to be.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

As the song “My Way” points out, the “final curtain” is not far away. It’s been an interesting ride.

I’ve played the game of life to the full.

I, too, have loved, laughed and cried.

I’m not afraid of death. Whatever lies on the other side, even if it should be the darkness of extinction, is just reality. Reality is all there is and no “faith” will change it.

I once told a friend who was getting dogmatic about doctrines of faith that it didn’t matter to me what he believed. His belief could not change reality.

My generation is slowly passing from the scene. Soon, even the memory of The Worldwide Church of God, Ambassador College and Herbert W. Armstrong will fade into the mists of the past. I hope my experiences may help a few avoid some of the mistakes and blunders I have made.

Some still cling to an organization whose very foundations have crumbled and is nothing like the church for which they sacrificed. It’s just a name now, and even that is now abandoned. It is now known as Grace Communion International.

I suspect the name change was mostly intended to distance themselves from the unsavory history of Worldwide and Herbert Armstrong as soon and as much as possible.

Just about every one of Herbert Armstrong’s original teachings, prohibitions, etc. has been lifted, disowned or forgotten by those who inherited his empire.

Those who left and set up organizations which continue the original bizarre approaches stubbornly cling to the illusion that Herbert Armstrong really was God’s chosen and appointed spokesman.

It reminds me of what a stockbroker said years ago when the market had dropped and dropped and many people lost entire fortunes that they had invested, rendering themselves bankrupt.

He said, “People just do not want to admit they have made a mistake. I tell them they better sell, even at a loss, and at least preserve part of their investment but they don’t want to let go and admit to others it isn’t working. They just ride it to the bottom. It’s sad.”

I feel the same way about people who wasted their youth and their lives living up to the unreasonable commands of one who claimed to be the spokesman for God. Many of them just can’t face the fact that they made a big mistake.

Some others just can't let go and put it all in the past. They constantly harangue about the injustices and the lies. They are still captive to the past. It practically eats them up. That's also very sad.

There will be, and even now are, new charismatic leaders with persuasive messages that suck in the unwary.

Beware those with all the answers to mankind's problems and/or claims to know the future.

Be especially wary, and run, if you are asked to check your brain at the door and accept what you are told without question because that leader is God's specially chosen representative.

Keep in mind this truism attributed to comedienne Lilly Tomlin. If you talk to God, it's praying. If God talks to you, you're schizophrenic.

Sources

The Internet is the quickest and best source of information on many topics. That includes information about The Worldwide Church of God, Ambassador College, Herbert W. Armstrong and the many splinter groups that have spun off from the organization I was once a part of.

For lists of organizations that have split off, go to these two websites:

<http://truth.fateback.com/>

<http://www.servantsnews.com/docs/coglist.htm>

The links you will find in these websites will lead you to just about any information you may want to know about Herbert W. Armstrong and his unique teachings. The splits and divisions that have developed are just about as confusing as in any other segment of Christendom.

You can find an abundance of factual information at this address:

<http://members.tripod.com/gavinru/>.

For comments and experiences of former WCG members and associates, check out this website: <http://ironwolf.dangerousgames.com/exwcg/>.

I highly recommend this website, maintained by a former WCG minister for some very thought provoking articles: http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Dennis_Diehl.

Another site worth spending some time in is: <http://gettingoverjesus.org/>.

The two books I mentioned previously, *The Forgery of the Old testament* and *The Myth of the Resurrection* by Joseph McCabe are easy reading and still available through Amazon.

When I want information, I go to Google or Yahoo and type in key words, names and phrases to search and a wealth of information comes up on the screen. How long these sources of information will be available, I have no idea. Websites and web logs, also called blogs, cost money, time and energy to maintain and many of their sponsors are getting elderly and/or are on limited incomes.

I've also found Amazon.com a helpful source of books, not just about this particular subject, but faith and religion in general.

Contact

Anyone who wishes to communicate with me is welcome to do so. I will try to answer but I will not engage in arguments. If you disagree with me, that is your right. Go ahead and write your own book. Don't bother with threats of divine retribution. They will not impress me in the least.

I would prefer either letters or emails.

If you wish to talk by phone, please give me your number and something about your schedule so I can call at a time convenient to you and to me. I have free cellular long distance evenings and weekends and also magic jack.

Email: phylandal@qwestoffice.net

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